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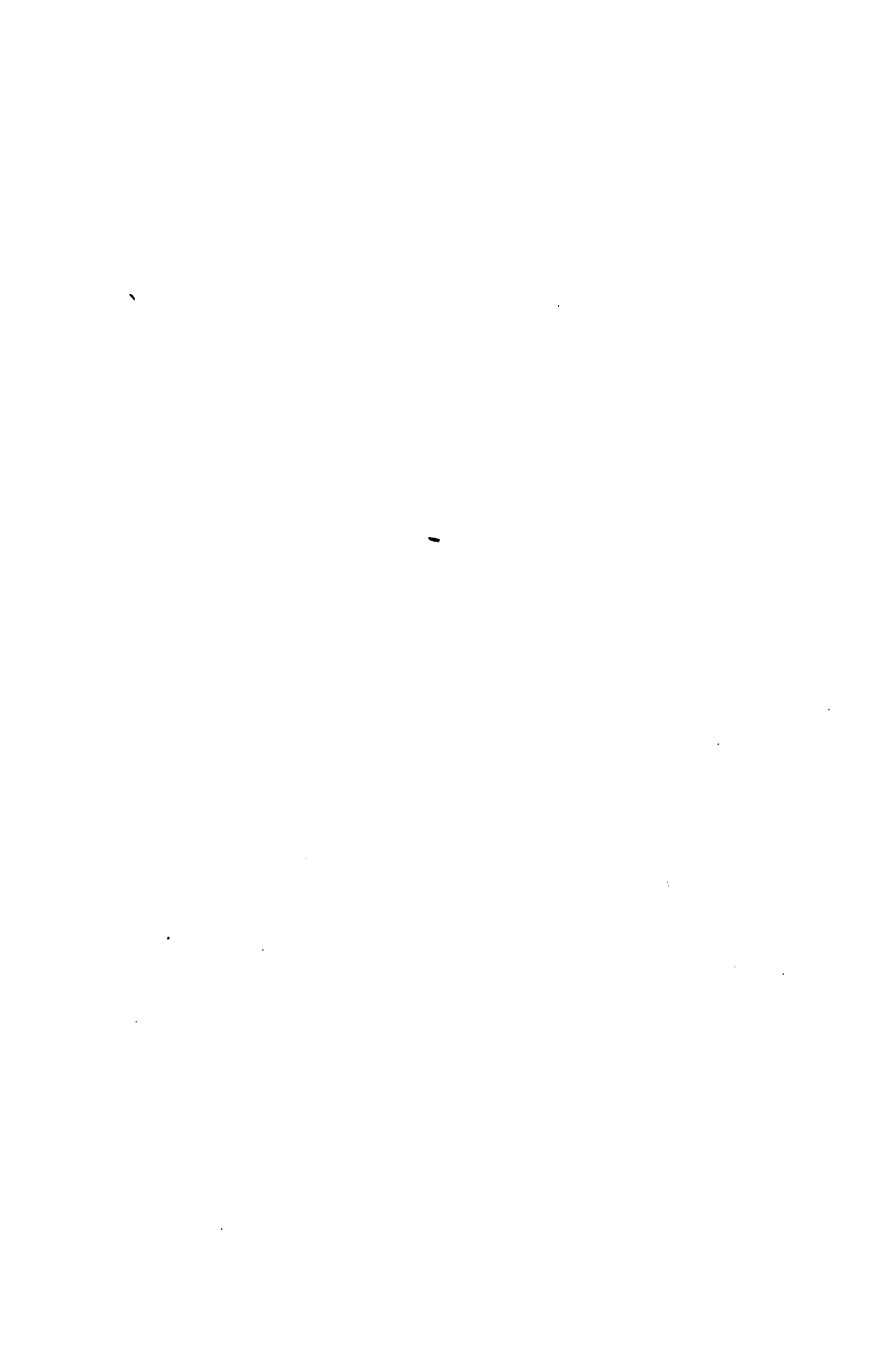
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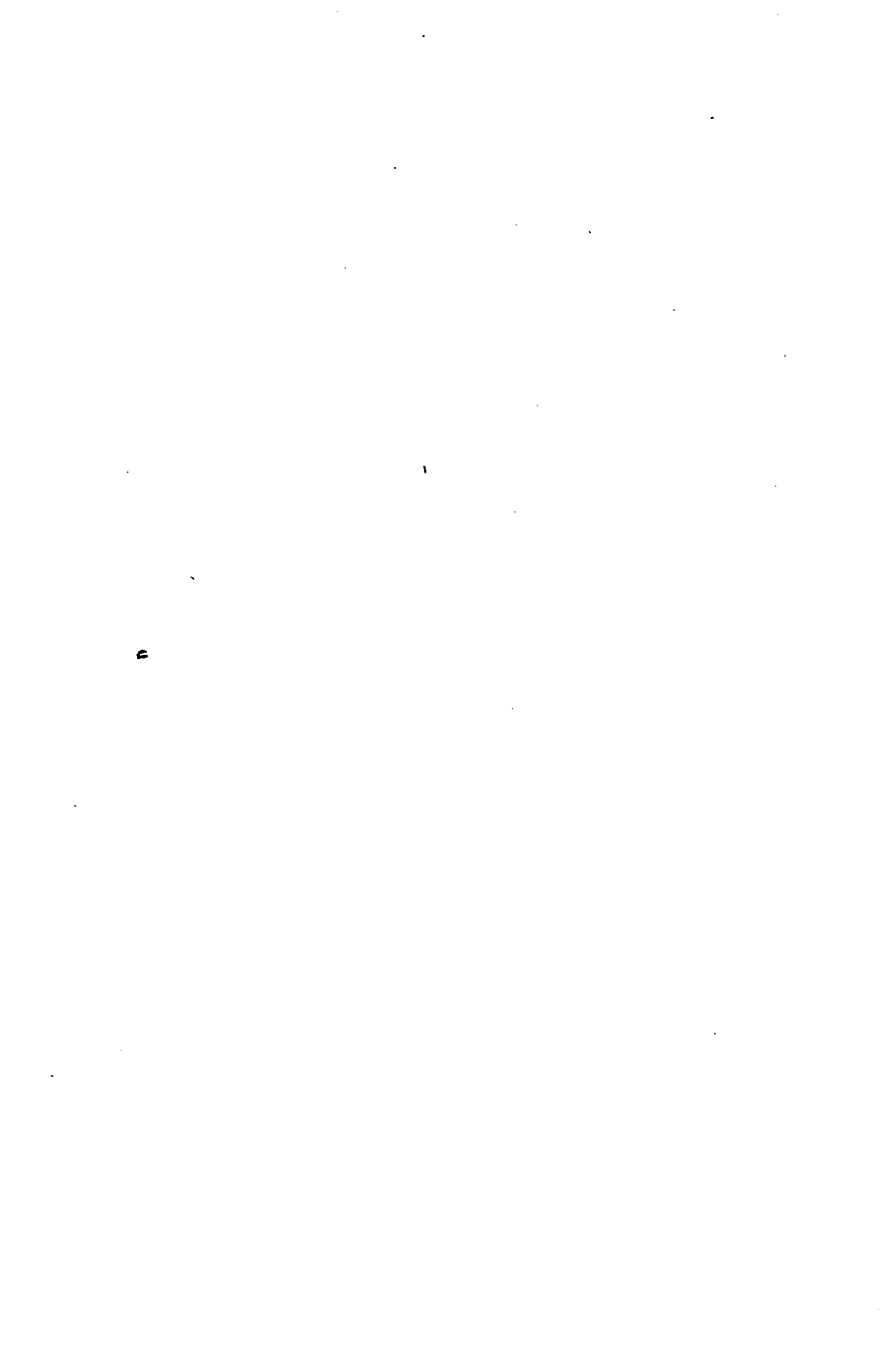
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SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS FOR 1889

BY

GEO. F. PENTECOST, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK,"
"OUT OF EGYPT," ETC.



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PREFACE.

GRATEFUL for the favorable reception accorded to BIBLE STUDIES for 1888, the author has pleasure in sending forth another volume, with the earnest prayer that it may be found to be of real help to his fellow-laborers in the vineyard of the Lord.

He has adhered to the same plan upon which the previous volume was prepared, endeavoring to maintain a proper balance between exegesis and exposition.

It is hoped that these studies will be available for other than merely a help to the better understanding and teaching of the Sunday School Lesson.

G. F. P.

MONTCLAIR, N. J., July, 1888.



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LESSON I.

THE MISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.—Mark i, 1-11.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.—Mark i, 3.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God ; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins ; and he did eat locusts and wild honey ; and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water : but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him : and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.—Mark i, 1-11.

Our studies for the next six months will carry us entirely through the Gospel by Mark, not taking every verse, indeed, but bringing before our attention and to our thought every chief fact as mentioned by this recorder of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark was not one of the Apostles, but he was the companion of the Apostles, and was well informed of, and perhaps personally conversant with most of the things of which he wrote. For the benefit of those who wish to be instructed as to whom Mark was, we refer them to the following Scriptures: Acts xii, 12, 25; xv, 37-40; Col. iv, 10; II. Tim. iv, 11; Philemon 24; I. Pet. v, 13. It is not of Mark, however, that we are to study, but of him of whom Mark wrote. The style of this author is energetic, graphic, strategic. He seizes upon the chief points of interest and treats them with graphic power, especially when, with a single stroke of his pen, he sets in the foreground some striking detail. His main purpose seems to be to set forth Jesus in the character of the divine Servant of God, "meting out the need of his brethren" according to the good will of God. Matthew and Luke give us detailed gene-

alogies of Jesus according to his human descent; John gives us his divine genealogy; but Mark does neither. He gives us a brief account of the events immediately preceding his appearance, and then plunges at once into the midst of his active ministry. We shall follow his memoirs of Jesus from beginning to end with the kind of breathless interest which characterizes his writing. "Immediately," "anon," "straightway," "forthwith," all translations of the same word "eutheos," are peculiar to and characteristic of this writer.

I.—THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL.

Some have thought that this expression, "The beginning of the Gospel," was meant as a kind of title to the book of Mark, but it seems hardly probable that this rapid writer would have stopped to think of a title. It was not the title but the contents of the book he had set about writing that occupied Mark; besides, he writes more than a beginning—he goes clear through to the end of the earthly life of Jesus.

1.—The beginning.—This is the first sentence in Mark's memoirs. He does not mean that what he writes, or the events which he proceeds to record, constitute the beginning of the Gospel, literally, but the beginning of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the events which preceded it in time. Had he been writing of the beginning of the being and work of Jesus Christ, like John he must have gone back into eternity where he was "with God"; had he desired to write from the beginning of the Gospel as declared to man, he must have gone back to the Garden of Eden, where Christ's coming was first announced to Adam and Eve. His beginning referred only to the events immediately preceding the public life of Jesus. What a wonderful beginning of things is here! The Gospel! Had he recorded the beginning of the work of justice and wrath to make an end of sinners, we should not have been surprised, after reading the story of sin and ingratitude, of unbelief and rebellion recorded in the Old Testament; but instead, we have the beginning of the dispensation of love and mercy to sinners; a beginning which was the end of the old dispensation of law and shadows and the bringing in of the substance of all that God had promised man in grace from the foundation of the world. What a humble beginning it was! One man—one voice—and both man and voice in the wilderness. Not a mighty prince, but a prophet-man, clad in camel's hair, with a leathern girdle about him. How different from the coming of an earthly prince did Jesus appear to take up his ministry! Yet as we get on in our study we shall see the

reason for this strange and simple beginning of the Gospel. It was because it was the beginning of the Gospel, and not the beginning of the kingdom; because it was the beginning of the grace of God, and not the beginning of the ceremonial pomp of a formal worship; because it was the beginning of a dispensation which was to reign in the hearts of men, and not in external paraphernalia of worship.

2.—The Gospel.—The record here is of the antecedent events to the appearing of the Gospel. What Gospel? "The Gospel of the Son of God." This may be taken in two ways, both of them, however, converging into one great and blessed truth. The Gospel is not primarily the contents of the Gospel, but Jesus Christ himself; and then of the communications made by him based upon who he is, what he has done and is evermore doing. Jesus himself is the Gospel. When Paul introduces his great Epistle to the Romans, he does it in much the same way. He speaks of "the Gospel of God, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord," who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. Then the Gospel is also the contents of the Gospel, or the things communicated to us by and in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul calls the Gospel "of his Son," *i. e.*, the Son of God, of which he declared that he was not ashamed, for it is the power of God unto salvation. (Rom. i, 3, 9, 16.) In this Gospel we have "God manifest in the flesh," "God in Christ;" that is, God uniting himself with our nature and setting up again his image in man, giving to us in this "second Adam" a new "head of the race," in whom we may take our stand for life, and from whom flows to us the abundant grace which is to take away our sin and restore us to God. (II. Cor. v, 19, 21; I. Tim. iii, 16; Heb. i, 2, 3.) In this Gospel, of which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the entire substance, we have the declaration of sins forgiven and expiated, justification and regeneration, reconciliation to God and final transformation into his image. (John iii, 3, 5, 16; Acts xiii, 38, 39; II. Cor. iii, 18; v, 20; Titus iii, 4-7; Heb. i, 3.) No wonder the angels sang when Jesus was born: "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." (Luke ii, 10.)

3.—"Jesus Christ, the Son of God."—This title is very full and significant. "Jesus" is his human name, which was given to him by the angel of God. "Thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matt. i, 21.) He was called "CHRIST," because he is the divinely-anointed Messiah, so called "because he filled the office of Saviourhood by sovereign and divine appointment." "THE SON OF GOD" because he was of higher nature than that of

man; because he was, in fact, one with God as to his nature. We can not stop to expound all the significance of this. It is enough to recall to your attention the fact that from the beginning this was affirmed of him, insisted on by him, and because of it he was condemned and put to death by the Jewish Sanhedrim. (Matt. xxvi, 63-66; Mark xiv, 61-64.) This declaration corresponds with that wonderfully full and comprehensive confession of faith by Peter: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. xvi, 16.)

II.—THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

The event preliminary to the appearance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the substance of the Gospel, concerning which this book is written, was the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea. This incident forms the second section of our study.

1.—**As it is written.**—It is a point much insisted on by all the New Testament writers that Jesus and his Gospel were not new in respect of their coming into the world. That is, in Jesus and his Gospel there was no new device or doctrine; they were the coming of that which had been the subject of all the prophetic utterances since the world began. Thus Paul and Peter declare the Gospel to have been "according to the Scriptures." (Rom. i, 2; I. Cor. xv, 3; I. Pet. i, 11; II. Pet. iii, 2.) Jesus himself insists that he was the subject of all Scripture prophecy. (Luke xxiv, 27, 46; John v, 39.) Not only was Jesus thus prophesied of, but his forerunner—the manner of his appearing and the method of his announcement—were specifically made known by the same inspired promises. Mark refers especially to two prophecies concerning John the Baptist. (Is. xl, 3; Mal. iii, 1.) John, then, was not only a prophet; he was the child of prophecy. These facts tend greatly to strengthen our faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

2.—**Concerning John himself.**—He was a man of austere and prophetic appearance and manner. Living apart from men, in separation from the corrupt church and from fellowship with the Pharisaical formalists and rationalizing Sadducees, he was in himself the embodiment of the protest he made. The greatness of his character and the force of his ministry testified that real religion was a matter of inward disposition and personal character, and not of outward forms and ceremonials, especially when they gave the lie to the profession of which they were the sign. He was a Voice as well as a man. And what a voice he was! One that called a whole city to his wilderness pulpit and compelled them to hear his stern rebukes. But he was also a messenger. He preached not himself nor any doctrines of his own,

but heralded the coming of one who was greater than he, in whom all his preaching headed up, and who was the only justification and reason for his mission.

3.—The Wilderness.—John appeared not in Jerusalem, either in the Temple or the crowded streets. His voice sounded forth from the wilderness, calling the people away from the city and the Temple wherein God no longer dwelt, because of their sins and hypocrisies. The wilderness has in it a lesson of separation as well as the teaching of John. To turn from Jerusalem and its burdensome, meaningless forms of worship to the wilderness, where the lusts of the flesh were denied, and to Jesus Christ the Son of God, was in itself repentance. Sooner or later all who receive Jesus must turn from the city to the wilderness. The Gospel unmistakably calls us from the place and things of man to the wilderness, where the voice of the prophets is heard and where Jesus dwells. Christianity involves separation and self-denial in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

4.—The preaching of John.—John's preaching was very comprehensive. An examination of all the evangelists on this point will show that he declared every fundamental doctrine of the Gospel; but if we confine ourselves to Mark's testimony, we shall find abundant evidence of the wideness of his range. (a) "*Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*" In this expression John calls on the people to make a straight way in which the Lord may travel. John prepared the way, in part, for the coming of the Son of God, by calling upon the people to prepare a way for him—a straight path through their thoughts into their hearts. God can only come, by Jesus Christ, into our hearts as we prepare the way and make the paths straight. No self-preparation, no self-straightening of the crooked ways of our lives will result in our salvation. It is only as the Son of God comes into our lives that we can be saved; but we are called upon to answer to his call, to unbar the door at which he stands and knocks. It is true that the preparation of the heart is from the Lord, but it is in response to our desire and willingness to be made whole. Here John teaches the great doctrine of human responsibility in presence of the Gospel, and human ability when exercised in response to the summons of God to make a pathway for him in our lives. The making of his way straight refers to the necessity of straightening our thoughts and ways. That is, we must be straightforward and honest before the Lord, and sincerely accept him, being ready to correct our evil courses in accordance with his will. A readiness to have Jesus Christ come into our lives and straighten them is the preparation of heart that is needed to receive him. (b) *By an involution of the verses, we*

come to the next great point. "There cometh one mightier than I after me." John was no egotist. He would not have his hearers for a moment think of himself. He was but a messenger, a voice. The real object of their interest and trust was another than himself. He, indeed, could give them some initial help and instruction, but ultimately they must deal with the Son of God, who would baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire. We must remember that the greatest of the servants of Jesus Christ can not save us, or even render any substantial help. They can only point to "one mightier than" any man. (c) *John urges upon his hearers three things—remission, repentance, and confession.* The most important of these is remission. "*The remission of sins.*" This is the great truth announced by the coming of Jesus into the world. God declared by him, first, the gracious disposition which is in his heart toward sinners, viz., the forgiveness of sins. (Acts xiii, 38.) This is the putting out of his heart personal offense, on account of our sins, and the declaration of his longing desire to have us reconciled to him. It has its highest expression in II. Cor. v, 19. This is the first thing to be declared in the Gospel of God by Jesus Christ. But remission also refers to the putting away of penalties. Christ's appearing in our nature is God's proclamation of forgiveness. Christ's appearance as the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world, is the proclamation of remission of penalties by expiation, the blessing of which is conditioned on our faith. (Acts xiii, 39.) Forgiveness is universal and unconditioned; but justification is conditioned on our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is universal in its provision, but limited in its application to believers. "*Repentance.*" The expression, "repentance unto remission," has the force of "because of remission." In view of the fact that God, by Jesus Christ, his Son, has declared his gracious forgiveness and provided in him for the remission of all penalties due to or attaching to sin, we should "repent." Repentance unto remission is the response of the sinner to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. To repent is to change one's mind in respect to God, and so in respect to sin, which is seen as guilt, and which only Jesus, by his blood, can expiate. When a man sees this grace and understands that through it his sins are forgiven and remitted, he turns to God in grateful acceptance and waits for the heart purification, which will come; and so shall he be made over in the likeness of Jesus Christ. It is the Gospel, therefore, and not the law that leads men to repentance. Few understand this, and therefore there is great confusion in Christian experience. The third great point in John's preaching was the duty of "*Confession.*" When the people heard of the grace of God,

they repented and gladly confessed their sins. That is, they not only with their lips acknowledged their inherent sinfulness and their sinful actions, but with their hearts they practically conveyed them over to Jesus as the sinners of old did when, through the high priest, they laid their sins on the head of the sin offering. (Lev. iv, 4; xxvi, 40, 42; Ps. xxxii, 5.) Confession involves both acknowledgment of sin and appropriation of Christ.

5.—The two baptisms.—John baptized his converts with water unto repentance, and promised them at the hands of the Mightier One, a baptism of the Holy Ghost. The baptism of John in water was the formal act of confession and declaration of faith or appropriation of Jesus Christ. This was but outward, and might not be significant of any thing at all, unless the subject did really repent and confess sins; but when the Lord came he would send into their hearts a mighty testimony of the Holy Ghost, who would not only make himself known in a saving and purifying work within them, but would endue them with power from heaven to overcome sin and serve God.

III.—THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.

After awhile—some days, weeks, or months—Jesus, of whom John had preached, came from Nazareth and sought, even demanded baptism at the hands of John. The fullest account of this is given by Matthew (iii, 13) and Luke (iii, 21).

1.—The baptism of Jesus by John.—What did it signify? Not that Jesus was a sinner, repenting and confessing sin. John saw an incongruity in the baptism of Jesus as he understood the meaning and significance of the rite; but Jesus put aside his objection, saying: "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt. iii, 15.) Jesus, when he came to this world, came not only in behalf of sinners, but he so identified himself with them that he judicially took their place under the law and assumed their condition because of sin. Therefore he stood forth as the representative of and substitute for sinners, and walked before them in the way of confession and appropriation. If in the act of baptism there was a significant type of his own death and resurrection. We have in it two things: first, the way in which he was to fulfill all righteousness, viz.: by dying and being raised again; and second, the way in which we come into righteousness, viz.: by union with him in spiritual death and resurrection, which we signify by our own baptism.

2.—The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus.—This occurred as he was coming up out of the waters of baptism. The descent of the

Spirit in the form of a dove, suggests that to and on Jesus came the Spirit in all fullness. In a smaller measure that same Spirit fell on the disciples at Pentecost, in the form of tongues of fire. It was meet that on Jesus the Spirit should come without measure, as indeed it did. This was his formal anointing and inauguration for the great work before him. If Jesus had need to be so anointed by the Spirit of God for his work, how much more do we need to be. He sends us forth as the Father sent him forth, and gives us the Spirit as the Father gave him the Spirit. (John xx, 21, 22; Acts ii, 3.)

3.—**The voice from Heaven.**—"And there came a voice from heaven saying: Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This was said to Jesus, though, possibly, John and others who were standing by may have heard it. It was said for his own comfort and assurance. He knew that he was beloved of his Father and always had been; but now, under these different circumstances, with his human consciousness uppermost, it was an assurance which he needed much to have, and was both a comfort and strength to him when it came. If we walk in his footsteps we shall have the heavens cleft above us, the anointing Spirit will fall upon us, and the comforting assurance of God's good pleasure will be given us.

LESSON II.

A SABBATH IN THE LIFE OF JESUS.—Mark i, 21-34.

GOLDEN TEXT.—As his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day.—Luke iv, 16.

And they went into Capernaum ; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever; and anon they tell him of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.—Mark i, 21-34.

After his baptism, Jesus was driven up by the Spirit into the wilderness, there to be tempted—that is, tried—preparatory to his more public conflict with all the evil agencies of the devil. Then he came forth and began to preach, and called to himself four disciples—Andrew and Peter, James and John. With these four he journeys to the city of Capernaum, and, it being on the Sabbath day (after having arrived in the town), he and his disciples proceeded at once to the synagogue, where he astonished the people with his teaching. The synagogue was an institution of late adoption by the Jews. It was a kind of church where the people resorted on the Sabbath day to hear the law read and expounded by some recognized teacher, or by any one, even a stranger, if he seemed to have the gift of speech and learning. The service was very free, so that any one entering was

at liberty to rise in his place and speak, or if he seemed to be a man of intelligence, he might be requested by the ruler to take part in the discussion or to deliver an original address. It was in accordance with this custom that Jesus either volunteered or was asked by the ruler to speak. From the first Jesus availed himself of this privilege and custom to teach his people and bring to the attention of the dwellers in both cities and villages the good news of the kingdom. We learn from Luke (iv, 16) that it was his habit, before he entered upon his formal Messianic ministry, to teach in the synagogues of his own town and those of the surrounding villages. During his first two years of public ministry this was his wont, that is, until his open rupture with the rulers by reason of the hatred which his teachings aroused.

L—JESUS TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY.

Whether before his baptism the teaching of Jesus had been marked with singular authority or power does not appear from the record; but it is more than probable that he had hitherto confined himself to a reading of the law and the prophets and a simple exposition of them. From Luke's account of his first appearance in the synagogue in Nazareth, where he was well known, after his baptism, there was then a marvelous change in his teaching. He announced himself as being especially anointed, and his teaching produced such a commotion among the people that he had to escape out of their hands for his life. (Luke iv, 14-30.) From Nazareth he went at once to Capernaum, and his preaching was attended with similar power, as our story tells us. It is for us to inquire as to the particular characteristics of the power or authority here spoken of.

1.—His self-assertion.—"He taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The scribes were the recognized teachers of the nation. They were mere pedants. They had made void the commandments by their traditions (vii, 13). They had smothered the word of God with innumerable refinements; adding to and taking from it; elaborating a cumbersome and senseless system of casuistry which entangled rather than relieved the conscience. They were mere religious speculators and doctors. Their teaching was vague and involved, so that the people, as a whole, neither understood nor cared for it. But now Jesus appeared and began to teach as one "having authority." That is, he taught from a new stand-point. He declared, first of all, that the "Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and that he was specially anointed to preach the Gospel." (Luke iv, 18.) In this he asserted also that he was the very Messiah whom the prophet pre-

dicted should arise. (Isaiah lxi, 1.) He taught as being authorized by his own right and power to teach. Not even as Moses taught, who always prefaced his communications with the usual formula: "Thus saith the Lord;" as also did all the prophets. The scribes did not even profess to have any authority directly from God, but repeated what Moses had said and then proceeded to give their opinions. Jesus, on the other hand, with a single stride put himself above the scribes, the prophets, and even Moses, for he began his address with a formula peculiarly his own: "Verily, verily, I say unto you." He not only had a message which had authority in it, but "he identifies himself with the message." The scribes had "constructed cisterns in which to store truth which they had gathered, or aqueducts to convey truth from higher levels;" but Jesus announced himself as the very source and substance of the truth. The divine self-assertion of Jesus was something entirely new and unheard of. "I am the truth, the way, and the life." "I am the door, the vine, the bread of life, the good shepherd, the resurrection; yea, before Abraham was I am." Such self-assertion must have astonished the people beyond measure. "They never heard it on this wise." This characteristic of the teaching of Jesus was peculiar to him. No other teacher, either before or since Jesus, ever identified himself with his teaching; that is, made himself the substance of his doctrine. "Come unto me and I will give you rest." "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." "I am the Son." It follows from all this that no one can accept the teaching of Christ without accepting him, for he is the substance of his teaching.

2.—The matter of his teaching.—We may judge something of the matter of his teaching by examining the sermon which he preached at Nazareth, just before he came to Capernaum. Perhaps he repeated that sermon. It is not unlikely that he did. He preached the Gospel to the poor; he declared that God had sent him "to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," that is, the Jubilee year, in which God proclaims forgiveness of sins and deliverance to sinners; and that this blessing comes, not by attending to ceremonials or by works of righteousness—religious performances—but by believing on him and uniting their lives with his life. He intimated, also, that this grace of God was not to be confined to the Jews only, but that as of old the Zidonian widow was made a subject of grace and Naaman the Syrian leper was healed, so now through him the whole Gentile world was to be included in the benefits of the "acceptable year." This teaching

was at once so simple, so gracious, and so comprehensive, that it produced a marked sensation of astonishment. The droning of the scribes, their senseless hair-splittings about mint, anise, and cumin; the length of the fringes on their garments and the breadth of their phylacteries were swept away as so much rubbish, and the great truths of the Gospel were at once brought to their attention. We can well imagine also, that he announced some of those mighty truths afterward gathered up in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, in which he cleared the law of the rubbish which the scribes had heaped upon it, and showed them that it was the spirit as well as the letter, if not rather *than* the letter which God held to be of account. His preaching must have both cut and bound up, wounded and healed the conscience.

3.—The energy of his teaching.—This was a new element in teaching. His word was “in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance.” The teaching of the scribes was in word only. It did not affect either the conscience or the life. It was mere speculation, the tossing about of opinions, which the people caught and cast back or played with as children play with a ball. Their teaching smote no conscience, touched no heart, regenerated no life. It was but the chaff of the wheat, blown about with the breath of words and definitions. But our Lord’s teaching was in power. His words were as a fire, a hammer, and a sword. (Jer. xxiii, 28, 29; Heb. iv, 12.) His words went like a coal of fire to their consciences, it smote their hearts like a hammer falling on the rock to break them, and as a sword it pierced even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, and the joints and the marrow, and discerned, that is, exposed to their consciences, even the thoughts and intents of their hearts. It took their thought away from mere external conduct to internal motive, and showed them that it was not that which went into a man that defiled him, but that which came out of his heart. Not clean hands made so by much washing, but a pure heart which withheld the hands from sinful actions. Not whole burnt offerings, but obedience to God; not sacrifices, but judgment and mercy. Thus did Jesus preach, and set us all an example of how to preach. He preached thus because he was anointed by the Spirit of God, and if we are to preach or teach like unto him, we must be similarly anointed.

II.—THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT.

One of the effects of his preaching was that it stirred up to an agony of wrath and fear a lot of demons who were in possession of a man

present in the synagogue. They recognized in Jesus the Holy One of God, who they somehow knew was to destroy them. The unclean spirit, as he is called, was one of several or many who had possession of this man, and was spokesman for them all. So that sometimes he speaks in the singular and sometimes in the plural. Who these unclean spirits were, is a matter that has occasioned much debate. They are called devils, but they are demons. There is but one devil; there are myriads of demons, subordinate spirits. It seems utter folly to attempt to identify these demons with mere physical and mental infirmities. They are always spoken of and dealt with as intelligences; evil spirits who, by some means, had power to enter into and assimilate with both the mind and body of men. There is no doubt in my own mind that the demons are the same in kind that have operated in all ages since the fall of man in connection with every form of false religion, especially paganism. They were the witches and gods of the Egyptians, and the inspiration of all the bestial and wicked ceremonies of the Philistines and the nations that filled the land before God gave it to his people. I believe these demons are the inspiration and evil power of all paganism to-day. Whether they are potent now with men or not, is a question. It is held by some, not without good reason, that one of the permanent acts of Jesus in the direction of destroying the works of the devil was to cast these demons out of men where the Gospel has come. They themselves asked: "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matt. viii, 29), that is, in advance of the final overthrow of the devil and all his hosts of darkness. On the other hand, it sometimes appears that these wicked spirits yet possess men, for there are some forms of wickedness which it seems impossible to conceive of except by supposing that men are driven to them by demons from the very pit. There are several things worth noticing in the interview between the Saviour and the demons. The presence of Jesus stirred them up; they could not keep still in his presence. This is always so. Evil can ill maintain itself in the presence of goodness; it must fly out against it and manifest itself. They were evidently well aware of him, and who he was. The demons from the pit know him and confess him, though wicked men affect not to recognize in Jesus Christ the Son of God. They were afraid of him, and in this they were wiser than many sinners are who have neither faith in Jesus as the Saviour nor dread of him as the final Judge of the living and the dead. They confess him, either in defiance or deprecation of his wrath. This confession of the demons sounds more to me like the wicked and impious blasphemies of sinners who take the name of Jesus in vain. Finally, we see that Jesus was master of them and cast them

out. What a blessing this suggests to us! There is come one who can not only teach with authority and rebuke sin, but he can cast it out. If we hear his word and yield to him, he will say to us: "Be thou clean," and with such power that we shall be saved. It was the power of Jesus over the unclean spirits that so profoundly impressed the people with his authority. Our preaching and teaching does not go forth with the seal of power until it is efficient in transforming the lives of sinners into saints.

III.—SIMON PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER.

Leaving the synagogue, Jesus repaired with his four disciples to Simon's house, where, with his brother Andrew, he lived; the house which afterward became his own home as much as any he ever had on earth. Here we find several points of interest.

1.—**A sick woman.**—In the house lay the mother-in-law of Peter, sick with a fever. This is another evil effect of sin, not necessarily her sin, but entailed sin. Sin brought all manner of evils into the world. Demons and disease follow in the wake of it. Perhaps the evil spirits have something to do with the diseases of the body as well as with the maladies of the mind. At any rate, sickness was one of the things which Jesus came to cure. He bare our sicknesses as well as our sins. (Matt. viii, 17.) "He is the healer of our diseases." (Ps. ciii, 3.) When he was on earth he delighted to heal all manner of sicknesses, and when he sent forth his seventy he gave them power to cast out devils and to heal diseases. (Luke ix, 1.) Certainly it is difficult to separate sickness from sin, either as a direct or an indirect result. Sickness is the forerunner of death, and death is the wages of sin.

2.—**Sympathetic friends.**—When Jesus entered the house, the disciples—probably Simon and Andrew—at once told him of the sickness of their relative. They had not known of his ability to heal the sick. Hitherto that power had not been displayed; but they reasoned from his power over the devils that he might heal the sick, especially as it was a common belief among the Jews that certain forms of sickness, particularly fevers, were the result of demoniacal agency. Having, therefore, witnessed his power over the unclean spirits, they said to themselves: "He will be able to heal her." This application to Jesus in behalf of the sick woman was, in effect, their prayer of faith for the sick. It is a blessed thing that we may resort to him for every thing and in every time of need. It is a comfort to the sick to know that there are sympathizing friends who will speak to Jesus concerning them. No class of sufferers are more in need of our tenderest sympa-

thy than those who are sick. Jesus specially commends the sick to our care and specially recognizes those as being his disciples who identify the sick with himself and as unto him visits them. (Matt. xxv, 39, 40.)

3.—A compassionate Saviour.—Jesus needed no urging, but immediately went to her, and taking her by the hand lifted her up, and the fever departed from her. We have already spoken of his compassion for the sick as well as the sinful, and remarked that his mission is to the diseased body as well as to the sinful soul. Whether or not we are warranted in expecting that in every case Jesus will heal the sick for whom we pray is by no means clear, either from the teaching of the Scripture or from experience. Certainly we are warranted always in bringing our sick ones to him in prayer. This much we know, that he “is the Saviour of the body also.” (Eph. v, 23.) Also, that when he comes he will raise the bodies of his saints, dishonored by disease and death, and fashion them like unto his glorious body. He came to destroy death, but the time is not yet. He came to heal all our diseases, but the time is not yet. These occasional manifestations of his power over sickness and death are rather to be taken as the promise of his final victory over both when the resurrection is accomplished. Let us wait upon him, but not dictate to him in this matter.

4.—Grateful recognition.—No sooner did this good woman rise from her bed than she set to work ministering to the wants of Jesus and his disciples. This should teach us that all the blessings we receive from God are to be employed in blessing others. He ministered to her, and now it is her grateful privilege to minister to him.

IV.—JESUS HEALING A MULTITUDE.

It is not surprising that the news of the appearance of this marvelous teacher, who also had power over unclean spirits, should literally fly over the country. The people soon found where he was, and came in crowds to his house. The sick and the demon-possessed were there in multitudes. Jesus was not weary in well-doing. He was instant in season and out of season; in the synagogue, in the house, and about the street doors of the house. Wherever there was need he was present to meet it. With this multitude he did as he had done with the two individuals. He healed the sick among them and cast out the devils. There were divers diseases and many devils. He is able to cope with them all. How blessed the thought that he is over all, and that all power in heaven and in earth is given unto him, and that he holds and uses it all for man's sake.

There is here an intimation full of suggestive interest. The demons, as they were brought into his presence hidden away in the bodies of their victims, were prone to cry out as did the unclean spirit in the synagogue. They would have confessed him also and remonstrated with him. But he suffered them not to speak, because they knew him. He commanded the unclean spirits to hold their peace, literally to muzzle their mouths. Why would not Jesus suffer these demons to speak and confess him? Would it not be a good testimony to him for even the devils to acknowledge his Godhead? No! Jesus revolts at the idea of receiving honor from these filthy and wicked demons. He will not be helped on by them. "Any help which might have come to him from the lips of hell, was shocking and revolting to him." There are men in the world who will not gain an advantage by doing wrong themselves, but who will not hesitate to accept an advantage that comes to them by the wrong-doing of others. There are churches who allow themselves to be patronized by men whose patronage is little short of the favor of demons. Jesus will neither take testimony nor a kingdom from the devil any more than Abraham would be made rich by the King of Sodom. He will wait for Peter to give him the full confession of his name when he shall be moved thereto by his "Father in heaven," and he will wait for the "kingdoms of this world to become his kingdom," when it shall please the Father to give him the full victory of his sacrificial life and death.

LESSON III.

HEALING OF THE LEPER.—Mark i, 35-45.

GOLDEN TEXT.—As soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.—Mark i, 42.

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils. And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.—Mark i, 35-45.

Mark, more than any other evangelist, records the activities of our Lord, and also shows us, especially in the opening incident of our present study, the secret of his strength, the source whence he drew his wondrous power, both of love and divine energy. In this study we see Jesus alone with his Father, in the sweet business of prayer; preparing for work and preaching among the towns and cities in the regions round about; healing lepers, and in general showing forth the mystery of his love and power to the sinful and unfortunate. What an illustrious example of divine service we have in Mark's portrayal of our Lord's busy life among men. Surely, if we need to have the enthusiasm of service kindled in our hearts, we can come to no better fire than that which burns so brightly and intensely in the pages which lie open to our study in this Gospel of Mark.

I.—JESUS AT PRAYER.

This glimpse of Jesus at prayer in a desert place is most impressive. It was at the beginning of his ministry, and gives us an insight

into the secret of his relations with the Father and his own sense of need as a servant engaged in the Father's business. Nothing more rebukes the indisposition of Christians to be much in prayer than to witness in Jesus Christ this constant habit of seeking private communion with God. Here we see him in a solitary place; again we find him apart in a mountain while his disciples were passing over the sea; at another time he spends a whole night in prayer; it was while he went up into the mountain to pray that he was transfigured. He seemed literally to begin and close every day's service with prayer. There are many lessons to be learned from this single record.

1.—The time of prayer.—It was “in the morning, a great while before day.” The previous day and the days before had been very busy. He had healed Simon's wife's mother; he had attended to the wants of the multitude that crowded about the doors of the house until late in the night, and had no doubt experienced great bodily and spiritual weariness from the healing virtue gone out of him and from the strain occasioned by his conflict with the demons. Surely, after such a day's work he might indulge himself in a long sleep the next morning. But no. A great while before day, while his disciples slept, he was up and away to some solitary place in the mountains, to get an hour or more of quiet communion with his Father. The morning is the best time for such exercise, for several obvious reasons, and the earlier in the morning the better. The mind is fresher in the morning than later in the day. The morning is a time free from the duties of the day. Later, the cares and business of life begin to press; the hurry and confusion of business demands our presence elsewhere, and unless we have taken time in the very earliest hours of the day, we are apt to postpone prayer altogether, or else to go through with it hurriedly and without restfulness or time enough to get response from God. There is a time element in “waiting” on the Lord as well as an attitude of dependence. Half the family altars in Christian homes have been broken down because prayer has been postponed till an hour so late in the morning that the tyrants of the day have dragged the worshipers away from their devotion, or interposed so many obstacles that prayer has been postponed. Prayer has been made to wait on physical indulgence in sleep, and finally dismissed for the want of time. We should lay great stress, in thinking over this record, on the specification that he “rose up a great while before day” in order to pray. Who of us is in the habit of sacrificing an hour's sleep for an hour's prayer?

2.—The place of prayer.—“Into a solitary place.” This is a fine description of retirement. Jesus could not have secured the privacy

of his communion had he remained in the house; and he knew well that if he was to have the full benefit of that hour or more with his Father, he must get away from men. Naturally, we do not like solitary places, chiefly because we do not like our own company; but no place, however solitary, as far as human company is concerned, is lonely if we resort to it for the purpose of being with God. The advantages of being in a solitary place are found in the freedom from interruption and from the distraction of sights or sounds that would otherwise divert our minds and hearts away from God. "Be still, and know that I am God." God can only speak with hearts that are still, and we can only come into stillness with God as we are away from the confusion of the world. It is difficult, often, to find a solitary place in which to pray, and yet any one who is purposed in his heart to get away alone with God, can find such a place either "in the cellar or in the attic." Where there is a will for solitary places in which to commune with God, there will be found a way to them.

3.—The secret of power is in prayer.—Prayer is not simply asking things for ourselves, but it is a communion with God in which we get rid of our weaknesses and the hindrances of carnal thoughts and low motives and get filled with divine strength for service; in which our consciousness becomes saturated with the divine Spirit and the conviction of the divine presence and co-operation strengthens and energizes all our powers. The greatest hindrance to efficient service for God is in self-reliance. Especially is this so after a season of successful labor, in which we have seen the work of the Lord prospering in our hands. Then we unconsciously assume that "strength is with us," and that we may go on healing the sick and casting out devils by the power already in us. Surely, if any one might have presumed on his sufficiency, Jesus might have done so, and yet we see him after a most successful day going very early in the morning, before work began again, to get refreshment and strength for the labors before him. God is our strength, and prayer is the method ordained of him for communicating it to us. "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings, as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." (Is. xl, 31.) Depend upon it, either for our private life or for service, the best furnishing of strength is to be found in the habit of solitary communion with God. This is especially true in view of what Jeremy Taylor so justly says: "There is no greater proof in the world of our spiritual weakness and the falseness of our hearts in matters of religion, than the backwardness most men have always, and all men sometimes, to

prayer; so weary of their length, so glad when they are done, so ready to find an excuse, so apt to lose an opportunity."

II.—THE NEXT TOWNS.

While the Master was away at prayer, the people began to gather in great crowds about the door of the house where he had been stopping. The disciples, finding that Jesus was gone away, immediately went in search of him. Perhaps knowing his habit in this respect already, they knew well where to find him. Having searched him out, they said to him: "All men seek after thee." This was their way of hinting to him that, in their judgment, he had stayed away long enough; that it was of more importance that he should be back in the city, healing more sick people and casting out more devils, than that he should spend longer time in prayer. This is after the manner of us ignorant and carnal servants. But if more people are to be healed and more devils are to be cast out, then there must be more prayer, and so more strength from heaven with which to do it. Beside, they did not understand Jesus nor his apprehension of his mission. They would have had him stay in that one town. He was in the high tide of popularity. All men were seeking after him, and more success would attend him at once if he would hasten back. To this urgent, though only implied advice, the Master remarked: "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, for therefore came I forth." "And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils." Let us learn, from this departure of Jesus from Capernaum to the next towns, these things:

1.—**A missionary plan.**—He could not spend all his time in one city, however important, nor could he wait till every soul in any one place was healed. The Gospel must be preached as a testimony by him and its work carried forward by the power of its own propagating force. There are other cities and towns that must hear the good news and be partakers of the blessings of his ministry. *Our* thought is to keep at home, and let other places go. "The next towns," is the *divine* thought. It is this idea that kindles the whole missionary movement of Christianity. It is this thought that is most needed among us to-day. We are practicing high farming in favorite localities while the regions beyond are being utterly neglected. The early Church would have stayed huddled up in Jerusalem, had not God scattered them abroad by the rude hand of persecution. The good seed of the Gospel must be scattered; the salt must not accumulate in heaps; the light must be radiated so that the next town, and the next,

and the next may hear the word of God and receive of his power. This determination to move on from town to town till the whole region of Galilee was reached and the testimony left with them all, was in accordance with his commission. "For therefore came I forth." There is some vagueness in this statement. Was it that he had come forth from Capernaum in pursuance with this plan, or does he refer to his having come forth from his Father? Perhaps both thoughts are true. Certainly he had come forth from the Father to go "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and therefore, having preached in Capernaum on this, his first missionary tour, he must go on till all the towns were reached and the testimony left with all. By and by he would come again to this city. So we are commissioned to go forth from him as he came forth from the Father and preach the Gospel to every creature. How surely has the Spirit of God been fulfilling, through the disciples of Jesus, this commission, until now the Gospel has been almost literally preached to every nation and people and tongue under the heavens. Yet there is much more to do. There are many towns and cities which have not heard the glad tidings. The plan of Jesus was literally carried out, for he preached in the synagogues throughout all Galilee. Happy shall we be if we faithfully follow his example.

2.—Effective preaching.—It is recorded that he preached and cast out devils. This is the only kind of preaching that does people good. Unless there goes forth with the word of God a power to cast out the demons of sin and deliver men from the bondage that holds them in subjection to the god of this world, it will be but an idle tale. It was characteristic of Paul's preaching at Thessalonica, that it led his hearers to "turn from their idols to serve the living God." There is too much preaching that is in word only; too many sermons that are sermons only; too much teaching that is doctrine only. If we would preach as Jesus preached and cast out devils, then we must learn how to wait on God in prayer as Jesus waited on his Father. The secret of his success in the towns is to be sought after in the "solitary places" *outside* the towns. Devils will not obey the word of a prayerless preacher.

III.—CLEANSING THE LEPER.

We do not know just where this incident took place; whether it was in one of the towns or on the highway as they journeyed from town to town. It does not matter, any more than it matters where we are healed or what were our particular surroundings. It matters only that we are healed. Leprosy was the most fitting type of sin known

to the Jews. It was an inward blood disease; subtle, insidious, all-pervading, working from within to the outer surface of the body, with resistless certainty, till at last the whole man fell rotting to the grave. By the terms of the ceremonial law, a leper was pronounced unclean and banished from the habitations of man, though the disease was not contagious. This leper had doubtless heard of Jesus and his wondrous cures of disease and his power over devils, and hope sprang up in his heart that he might thoroughly heal him; for it is evident that the leper sought Jesus for physical cleansing, and not merely for ceremonial cleansing which he was sure to obtain from the priest when his disease had reached a certain stage. The whole incident is one of the most thrilling and touching recorded in the Gospel narrative.

1.—**The leper.**—Who can tell with what faith and hope that wretched outcast, that hopeless victim of the fell disease, came to Jesus? It was sufficiently strong to enable him to leap the bars of ceremonial prohibition and run into the presence of Jesus, regardless of the religious impropriety of the act. What cared he now for mere ceremonial? What cared he for the scorn or curses of men, if there was but a single chance that the Great Healer and demon-master would heal him? That he could heal him he had no doubt. Whether he would he was determined to find out; and so he came boldly forth from the motley crowd of his leprous companions, who were gathered like the froth of the sea on the edges of the highway, and fell at the feet of Jesus. In this he took a humble and suppliant attitude. However bold and defiant of the opinions and customs of men, in the presence of Jesus he becomes humble and pitifully reverent. He worships at the feet of him from whom he seeks healing. So must we all come who have sin to be forgiven and leprous souls to be cleansed. His prayer is most comprehensive and frank. "If thou wilt, thou canst make me whole." That he had the power he fully believed, and on that point he boldly confessed his faith. But whether his disease was one so loathsome, so defiling, so under the ban of God that the purpose of this gracious Healer did not comprehend it, he did not know. However, he would cast himself on his pity. There are sinners who have no doubt of the power of Jesus to save, but they fear their sin is too great, or on some account is so peculiar that he will not save them. They little know Jesus. It is not if he will, but if sinners will. For he hath said for the comfort of all: "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." And it is he who asks sinners: "Wilt thou be made whole?" His gracious will waits on ours; so that when we will, he always wills and does his utmost grace. Therefore let us think on

the word and rejoice in it, for we know more of him now than this leper did then. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

2.—Jesus.—How tenderly beautiful the account of the attitude of Jesus toward this wretched but not unbelieving leper. "He was moved with compassion." The deep compassion of that tender heart was always moved at the sight of misery, whether moral or physical, and it was always ready to overflow when appealed to. So was it now stirred with pity for this poor wretch, lying at his feet and appealing to him. Nor did it stay pent up a single moment; for immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand. That mighty hand that created worlds and upholds them, was now stretched out to heal a leper. It is ready to be stretched out for the healing of any sinner who comes to him. It was not merely power that Jesus exercised toward the leper; but a heavenly compassion. "He touched him." How the diseased body must have thrilled at the touch of immaculate purity. For another that would have been defilement, but not for Jesus. He never feared ceremonial defilement. He touched the leper; he laid his hand on the dead body of the man of Nain, and took hold of the dead hand of Jarius' daughter. He could not be defiled. There is healing and life in the compassionate touch of Jesus. Infinite tenderness is manifested to the deepest human wretchedness. A beautiful and pure woman went into a New York prison, where she saw a miserable woman, wrecked by a life of licentiousness and debauched by drink. She approached to speak to her, and, as she did so, stooped down and kissed her polluted lips. The woman sprang to her feet as though she had been touched with fire, and then bursting out into great sobs of penitence, fell at the feet of the Christian woman who had kissed her. "Do you come to me in the name of Christ; and do you kiss me for his sake? Then will he save me who has put such pity in your heart." And she gave herself to Jesus and was saved. Let us learn this lesson. Then Jesus confirmed his act with his word. "I will; be thou clean." Doubtless that touch and that word dwelt evermore in the heart of the cleansed leper. A hand of power, a touch of tenderness, and a word of authority will make any soul clean and confident to whom they come; and they will come to all who, like the leper, seek for them at the feet of Jesus.

3.—The leper charged and disobedient.—Having healed him, Jesus sent him at once to the priests for ceremonial cleansing and for a testimony, at the same time charging him to tell no man of what had happened. The object of this charge was two-fold. First, that in the healing of the leper the priests might have a witness of what was

doing, which would avail much in the future, when the controversies of a later day would take place; and, second, to avoid firing the town and people into that kind of excitement which hinders the best work of Jesus. The leper disobeyed. He is partly excusable from his point of view. Why should he go to a priest for a mere form of words to be passed over him who was clean actually, though not ceremonially? How could he hold his peace when he was the subject of such a miracle? Thus he reasoned. Thus many a Christian reasons and acts on impulses, good and true enough, and yet contrary to specific command, and works only mischief where he means to do good. The effect was that Jesus could no more openly enter the city. The wild and uncontrolled excitement sometimes indulged in very honestly by enthusiastic souls at religious meetings, often hinders the best work of God. Simple obedience to the word of Christ is better than blazing one's experiences abroad.

LESSON IV.

FORGIVENESS AND HEALING.—Mark ii, 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Who forgiveth thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.—Psa. ciii, 3.

And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately, when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.—Mark ii, 1-12.

Having made his tour of Galilee, Jesus returns with his disciples to Capernaum. His presence in the city was soon noised abroad, and presently a great multitude of people came together about the house where he was. The house was filled, the passage-ways were blocked, and the house surrounded. We do not hear that at this time Jesus wrought any miracles of healing among the multitude, but "he preached the word unto them." What would we not give to have heard one of his discourses in full and beheld his face as he spoke to the people! If there was life in his words, there was benediction in his looks and manner. Yet we have the sure word of teaching in the "book he has given," and which tells of his love, and of that of the Father who sent him; and if we search the Scripture we shall find in it all that he at any time said to the people. And since he is not dead, but alive from the dead, his words are still full of spirit and life, and are just as potent to bless now as then. In the house, with those who

were gathered there, "occupying the chief seats," no doubt, as their custom was, and, with cold, formal and jealous interest, criticising all he said and did, watching for an occasion to catch him in his talk, were the Scribes and Pharisees. This is the first time we hear of these formal religious teachers taking any notice of him, and this interview is the beginning of that long series of verbal conflicts which Jesus had with the Jewish teachers and rulers, which ended in his death and our salvation. A familiar method of treating this lesson is to divide it under these three heads: "The Healer, the Helpers, and the Hinderers." We shall not follow these divisions exactly, but they may serve to guide the thought of the student into the heart of the subject before us.

I.—THE SICK MAN AND HIS FRIENDS.

God has, in his providence, so ordered that we are all related to each other in bonds of helpfulness or dependence. It is a question whether the joy of the healed man or that of his four friends, who were so potent in their instrumentality in securing to him his double blessing, was greater. Certainly the joy that comes into the heart of a sinner who hears the blessed words of Jesus, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," is beyond that which can be awakened by any earthly blessing; and it is equally true that the joy that comes into the heart of the soul-winner is akin to nothing else on earth. We envy the joy of the soul-winner, and we pity the barrenness of soul (for the lack of such joy) of the man or woman who has never been consciously and purposely instrumental in bringing any one to the feet of Jesus.

1.—The sick man.—There is before us a man who was a palsied paralytic; a disease at once painful in its perpetual restlessness and miserable in its hopeless helplessness. A fit type of that deeper disease of which it is so suggestive. Sin is a trouble in the human soul; a disease which is like the worm that dieth not and the flame that is not quenched. To the unforgiven and unsaved sinner there is no peace either on earth or in hell. Like the evil spirit, it is ever seeking a dry place for rest, and finding none. Palsy is a disease which the natural forces of the body are unable to throw off, and that is not amenable to the curative arts and science of medicine. So neither can the sinner, of himself nor by the help of any human power, expel sin from his soul. How wretched, to be ever doomed to this restless, shaking misery! Back of this physical infirmity our Lord hints that there was a guilty origin. (John v, 14.) In the case of this man, as well as the one healed at the pool of Bethesda, the paralysis may have been the immediate result of some moral transgression. In all cases sickness

can not be traced immediately to actual transgression, but back of all disease, without doubt, sin is the fruitful cause. Therefore we are told by Jesus that he who forgiveth our sins also healeth our diseases. No doubt this man who came to Jesus, helped thereto by his sympathetic friends, found a cause of brooding bitterness in the remembrance of some sin which produced his paralysis. Many another sinner is preparing for himself a miserable bed of sickness, the pain and agony of which will be more in mind than in body. Whether this sick man had faith in Jesus to cure his palsy we are not directly told, but the fair inference is that he was a willing visitor to Jesus. His friends would scarcely have brought him against his will. On the other hand, he would scarcely have come, even if he could have done so, without the help of their faith. There are multitudes of sinners who do not and will not, nay, can not move toward Jesus without the stimulus, encouragement, and help of some other's faith. If we but look about us we shall be able to find them, and, finding them, they will cheerfully, willingly, be brought to Jesus.

2.—The sick man's friends.—This is one of the most interesting group of "faithful helpers," whose good work is brought to our attention in the Bible. There were four of them. Who they were or how they came to have such sympathy for their palsied friend and such faith in Jesus, we do not know. It is not difficult to imagine or believe that they were of those whom Jesus had healed on his first visit to Capernaum. Certain it is that none are so ready to help others to Jesus as those who have been helped by Jesus. Several interesting particulars are suggested by their action in this matter. (a) *They had faith in Jesus.* This is apparent by the words of the historian, who says of Jesus, when the sick man was laid or let down at his feet, that "when he saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.'" It is only men of faith who can truly do good to others. If we do not believe in our hearts and souls that Jesus Christ can forgive and heal sinners, we shall certainly never bring any such to him. But faith does not alone attach itself to Jesus; it goes out in profound sympathy to others than ourselves who have needs similar to those in ourselves which Jesus has met. A man who says he believes in Jesus Christ and has been saved by him, but who yet is not moved with compassion toward those who are not saved, belies his faith and is not a true disciple of the Son of Man. The Spirit of Christ in us which comes by our faith in him, is certain to awaken a compassion for sinners that is akin to that which Jesus himself felt for them. No man can love God or be moved by his love without also loving his neighbor. The sympathy of these "helpers" went out to their friend

on account of his physical suffering; but the man or woman who knows the blessedness of forgiveness and reconciliation looks deeper than the temporal miseries which beset men. They see in sin a worse affliction than any bodily disease, and in the holiness of life which comes from spiritual contact with Jesus a greater blessing than bodily healing. They see in sin not a remote calamity, but a present one, even spiritual death; and in salvation not an ultimate heaven, but a present restoration of character, which is heaven begun. Therefore they are in haste to get men to Christ at once. (b) *Theirs was a practical faith.* Faith is not merely a sentiment which believes something to be, but a vitalized affection which starts all our faculties into action and sets us to work to accomplish something. That is not a true faith which simply longs to see people saved and spends itself entirely in prayer, any more than is that true sympathy which is contented with some tender feeling of compassion. True faith, like true compassion, materializes in practical help. It was so with these men; it ought to be so with us. (c) *Their faith was resourceful.* There were difficulties in their path. No one of them could have brought the sick man to Jesus; therefore they combined and wrought together. The work of faith in this world is of such a nature that it requires and brings about fellowships and joint action. We are not only workers together with God, but with each other. After having begun together this good work, the sick man's friends found other difficulties in the press about the house, so that it was impossible to get in by the ordinary way of access. They were not discouraged. They took to the roof of the house by the outer stair that led thither. Again they were met with difficulty. The little opening in the roof was too small to let the bed on which their friend was lying down into the court below where Jesus was. Though the lifting of the tiles involved some damage to property, some violation of conventional usage, and would entail expense and excite criticism, they were not deterred. What though it was irregular and would provoke the rebuke of the scribes below and, perhaps, scatter the *débris* of the roof down upon the heads of the company who had the monopoly of our Lord's presence; they went ahead, as a quaint old writer has put it, "confident that Jesus would be more pleased to have this sick man at his feet than disturbed by the falling mortar," and "convinced that it were better to get their friend healed first and settle the bill for the broken shingles afterward." This was a real enthusiasm of faith. Such a faith is more needed to-day than any thing else in the Church of God. While the scribes are reasoning in their hearts, the disciples of Jesus ought to be on the house-tops, tearing up the tiles and getting sinners down at his feet. This kind of

faith "wins a blessing, and none the less wins it though it is the free gift of Christ."

II.—JESUS AND THE SICK MAN.

It is true that Jesus spoke only to the sick man. Nevertheless, he did not overlook the faith of his friends. Indeed, it was when he saw their faith that he spoke to the palsied sufferer. What he did for him is beautifully brought out in the single sentence: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Matthew tells us that Jesus first said: "Be of good courage." What a heaven of help there was in those words to the poor man!

1.—The divine fellowship of Jesus.—Here was a poor man; perhaps one who had largely lost the kindly and tender love of earthly parents; perhaps had by a course of sins (like some poor drunkard) alienated the sympathies of men from him; a man of desolate spirit as well as suffering body. It must have been like a breath of heaven falling on his spirit to hear that tender appellation, "Son." Jesus was the Son of his Father. He knew what that means, and so now he would impart by his very first words a comfort which should go to his very heart, and assure him that he was not cast out of the heart of God. As the Father loved him, even so did he assure this sinner that he was loved. He is not ashamed to call us his brethren. "You, too," he seemed to say, "are a son of God; not because you have honored him in your life, but because he has sent this wondrous 'manner of love' into the world that 'called us and makes us to be the sons of God.'" (I. John iii, 1, 2.)

2.—Be of good cheer.—Ah, what good cheer does Jesus bring into the world! This was a favorite expression of our Lord's. He spoke it often to those whom he healed. He spoke it to his disciples in their troubles. He spoke it to Paul when he was sore perplexed and in danger of his life; and Paul afterward passed it on to the shipwrecked crew who were sailing with him to Rome; and when he met the brethren on the Appian Way, he "thanked God and took courage." These four blessed words were the prelude to that heavenly symphony which followed, and which has since filled a sin-cursed and sin-burdened world with the joys of salvation.

3.—Thy sins be forgiven thee.—Here was the word of power never before spoken by man on the earth. The poor man came for the healing of a bodily infirmity, but he who knoweth what is in the heart of man saw a deeper need than was confessed; a need which perhaps the sick man did not dare to hope might be removed. If there was

nothing else in store for him, this might make him blessed indeed. The grace of God is deeper than man sees. They who come to Jesus always get more than they come for. The world is ready to acknowledge the outward benefits of Christianity, ready to part the garments of Christ, even while they see not the higher benefits of the cross. This was the first time that Jesus spoke direct words of forgiveness of sins to man, and it is noticeable that it is the first word he spoke to this man. In the fuller unfolding of the Gospel after his resurrection, we learn that it is the first word spoken to the world in the Gospel of reconciliation. "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." Jesus did not wait for this man to unbosom his soul to him, to pour out his bitter confession and give proof of contrition, but at once spoke the "word of power to him" which assured him of the deep, eternal love of God. This is God's argument with the sinner—his appeal for our reconciliation (II. Cor. v, 20), not his response to our penitence.

4.—**"Arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way."**—Forgiveness is not all. Whoever receives the forgiveness of sins shall hereafter receive the entire healing of the body. It may not be now, but in the resurrection all forgiven sinners shall arise from disease, and even death itself, and with bodies transformed and fashioned like unto the body of Christ's glory, shall go their way into the Father's house and home in glory. If we receive the forgiveness of sins from him, we may patiently wait for the healing of the body. It will certainly come.

5.—**A new fashion.**—"We never saw it on this fashion." They were all amazed, and well they might be; and well might they glorify God on this behalf. Thank God for this "new fashion" which Jesus has brought into the world. Not a mere doctrine; not the logic of a religious philosophy; but burning words of love and sympathy, spoken with power that dissipates sin like mist before the rising sun; with such power as to send a new stream of life flowing through soul and body. Man is not left comfortless in his sin and death, but God has come to him in the likeness of sinful flesh, to put away sin and restore him to health both of soul and body.

III.—JESUS AND THE SCRIBES.

Luke tells us that Scribes and Pharisees and Doctors of the Law out of every town of Galilee and Jerusalem were there. They had come to investigate, and doubtless to put down this rival teacher.

They had come in force to overawe him and intimidate the people. Pedantry, formalism, and the wisdom of this world were then, as now, sitting in cold, heartless, critical, and jealous judgment upon the doctrine and grace of Christ. How little they understood either the real needs of man or the great, dear love and grace of God. The interview is full of instruction.

1.—The Scribes and Pharisees reasoned in their hearts.—So the world reasons to-day; but God's blessed Gospel is something better than the product of human reason. It is a heavenly revelation. They said when Jesus spoke the word of forgiveness to the man: "This man blasphemeth." So they said of him to the last and hanged him on the cursed tree, but God raised him from the dead and answered their blasphemy. They said: "Who can forgive sins but God only?" In this they were right, but they knew not that he who spake this blessed word was God manifested in the flesh. To them forgiveness of sins was but a formal doctrine of their cold and word-splitting orthodoxy. They knew nothing of God's heart and cared nothing for man's misery of sin. To them religion was mere doctrine and forms. That grace could reach the heart without the interposition of their washings, fastings, prayings, processions, and phylacteries, they never dreamed. Indeed, they knew nought and thought not of grace at all, nor of the power of God acting through his love. Acceptance with God was a reward of their own merit, and not the fruit of a divine compassion that reached deeper than hell and higher than heaven. They thought he was playing them a trick and eluding their watchful eyes. He would not and could not, they thought, heal the body, as was reported of him, and, instead, would put them off with a declaration of something done for the man which no one could see or know. And this they said he would do, even at the expense of blasphemy. It was a trick, a crime, and an imposture. Thus does the world reason to-day of the Gospel and its sweet message. It is either a blasphemy, a fraud, or a fanaticism. "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." Unbelief demands a miracle or a syllogism; and were both given, unbelief would make answer that the one was not true because impossible, and the other insufficient because not comprehensible to reason.

2.—Our Lord's answer.—While they reasoned in their hearts and muttered among themselves, Jesus, who perceived the deep secret of the palsied man's soul, also perceived the heartless jealousy and hypocrisy of their hearts. In his answer he lays bare their thoughts to themselves, and in that very fact gives them proof of his supernatural authority, and proceeds to overthrow all their reasoning by

the act which followed. "You think I am evading your scrutiny. You think it easy to say : 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' and that this is nothing but an empty word. Do you think it easier to forgive sins than to heal a body? That you may know, therefore, that my words are not empty, I will now do that which in your hearts you think I can not do." Therefore he spoke the word of power that sent the man forth healed and well in body as in soul. So is the answer of Christ to-day in the healed souls of men, which healing is impossible to explain apart from heavenly grace and power; and in the day when he shall raise the dead, even as God raised him from the dead, shall the unbelieving world know that "the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." As the healed and forgiven man went out from their presence through the crowd which would not give way for him to come into the house, so shall the forgiven and healed disciples pass through the crowd of unbelievers on their way to their home in heaven.

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LESSON V.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.—Mark iv, 10-20.

GOLDEN TEXT.—If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.—Mark iv, 23.

And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God : but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables : that seeing they may see, and not perceive ; and hearing they may hear, and not understand ; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them. And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable ? and how then will ye know all parables ? The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown ; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground ; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness ; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time : afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they which are sown among thorns ; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground ; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.—Mark iv, 10-20.

Our Saviour had two methods of teaching, one direct and the other indirect. He came to at once hide and reveal the truth—that is, to unveil it fully to those who are seeking after it with all their hearts, as were Nathanael and the eunuch, and to veil it from those who are prejudiced against it and determined not to receive it, as were the scribes and doctors among the Jews. His parabolic teaching is an illustration of this double method. Hence, we have the bare statement of the parable to the multitude (vs. 3-9), but to his intimate disciples, and those other earnest souls who remained with them after the multitude had departed, he unfolds the parable and shows to them the inside of it (vs. 10-13). We have in this method an illustration of our modern public preaching service, and afterward the more private inquiry-room. The public teacher deals with great principles, not stopping to explain every thing he says, or to answer all possible questions that may be suggested by or arise out of his discourse. If,

after the public address is over, there are those who have become interested to know more and follow the subject further, they may do so by remaining and asking questions. Every teacher should study this divine method and perfect it as far as possible. For public address grasp and state the great truths of God's word, and do it in such a way as to arrest attention and excite interest. "Behold!" Here is something worth looking at. "Hearken!" Here is something worth thinking about. Then if your parable or teaching has caught the ear and arrested the attention of any, give them an opportunity to pursue the matter further. To such we ought to be accessible, patient, painstaking, sympathetic, and willing to explain the smallest detail and answer the most trivial question.

I.—TWO KINDS OF HEARERS.

There are two sides of truth and two kinds of hearers. There is an outside and an inside of truth. All men can see and understand the mere outside fact of Christ's incarnation, life, death, burial, and resurrection, but only those who are eager to know more than the bare fact ever learn that back of this outward manifestation of God there is a great and blessed mystery of grace—whereby man is laid hold of by God, his sins put away, and he reconciled and saved. It is the inner meaning, the "secret," the "mystery" of truth that is reserved for those who, as it were, stay behind and ask questions. Therefore, our Lord opened his parable with these two startling words, "Behold!" "Hearken!" and closed his public teaching with this significant sentence: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

1.—The hearer on the inner circle.—"Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God." This inside hearer is not one to whom our Lord has arbitrarily granted a peculiar privilege, but he is the one who, because of attention and real interest in the truth and desire to know the secret of the Lord, comes closely to the Great Teacher, and puts himself in the attitude of an inquirer. To such he unfolds the parable, or takes away the veil of natural imagery, and shows them the inner and spiritual truth hidden behind the parable. They had ears to hear, and therefore they were privileged to hear and understand. They were like the Ethiopian, who was reading the prophet Isaiah. He could not understand what he read, but he desired to understand, and therefore the Lord sent Philip to open up to him the mystery of the kingdom of heaven, which is in Jesus Christ. (Acts viii, 26-39.) Those who remained beside the apostles after the multitude had departed (vs. 10), were real, earnest, and

honest inquirers; therefore to them Jesus explained the parable. There is no truth of God revealed and veiled in the Bible that the Spirit will not open to the understanding of an honest and child-like inquirer. It is not great learning that is needed to understand the mysteries of the kingdom, but a good and honest heart; not the cultured but the sincere mind understands the truth of revelation. To the wise and prudent, these things are hid, but to babes they are revealed. (Matt. xi, 25-27.) Men who esteem themselves wise (in their own conceit of wisdom) become fools (Rom. i, 21, 22), but those who are simple-hearted and child-like in their desire to know and do the truth are sure to know it. Our Lord has said: "He that willeth to do the will of God shall know of the doctrine" (John vii, 17), and St. Paul says: "The things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of (the natural) man, are revealed by the Spirit to them that are spiritual, that is, to them that are in their hearts submissive to the will of God." (I. Cor. ii, 7-16.) To such hearers the parable of the sower will be full of spiritual meaning, and they will look away from the man who scatters seed into the ground and from the harvest of bread-corn for the life of the body to him who came from heaven to sow the truth into our hearts in order that it might bring forth in those who receive it everlasting life and fruit of righteousness unto God.

2.—The hearer on the outer circle.—"Unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables." Two things are set before us in verses 11 and 12. First, we have a company or class of hearers of God's word who do not wish to understand it or do it. They come to hear, not that they may understand and be converted, but that they may find fault and justify themselves in rejecting truth; just as there are those who read the Bible, not that they may find the truth, but that they may find contradictions and evidences of the untruth of its main teachings. They are the prejudiced and insincere hearers, who are in their hearts opposed to all spiritual knowledge of God and a life of holy spirituality. They neither love nor desire to know the truth. They are like the scribes and doctors in our last study, who came to "catch" Christ in some trick and accuse him of some blasphemy; and those who were always asking questions, not to elicit truth but to involve Jesus in contradictions and inconsistencies which would justify them in denouncing him as an impostor. To these Jesus did not speak plainly and directly, but veiled his teaching in parables: "*That seeing they may see and not perceive; and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins be forgiven them.*" The construction of this sentence is such that

at the first reading it almost seems to indicate that Jesus hid the truth from them because *he* did not want them to see, understand, be converted, and have their sins forgiven; whereas, the meaning is just the reverse. The truth is, he knew the inveteracy of their prejudices and the opposition of their hearts to a purely spiritual kingdom. "For their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time *they* should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and be converted and I should heal them." (Matt. xiii, 15; Acts xxviii, 27.) They had an inveterate prepossession of something beside that which Jesus came to teach and give. Had he at once opened to them with absolute plainness and directness the utter spirituality of his mission, they would have immediately rejected it. They were not able to hear or receive plain and direct teaching. They were so blunted by prejudice and their hearts so hardened by long rejection of the manifest teaching of the Holy Ghost, that to have turned on the full and unclouded light of truth, would have permanently blinded them. He, therefore, sought to let the light into them through the veil of an unexplained parable, as the oculist lets the light in dimly and gradually to the patient upon whose eyes he has operated for a cataract. Had he taught them plainly, they would have been hopelessly repelled; but by means of a parable he sought to excite their interest and lure them on to thoughtful inquiry, as doubtless some of them were lured who stayed behind with the Apostles and heard the explanation of the parable. I am the more anxious to try to set this matter right because many careless readers, even among our Lord's true disciples, have been led into the indulgence of wrong and hard thoughts against God, as though he had hardened the hearts of men and blinded their eyes according to some purpose of reprobation, lest they should hear and see and believe, and so he be compelled to save them whom he did not wish to save. The very reverse of this is true. God's desire was to save; but to do so, having cut the cataract from their blinded eyes, Christ put a thick bandage of parable over them, which was removed, little by little, through successive teaching, lest the sudden effulgence of the light should utterly reblind them and drive them back into permanent and hopeless darkness.

II.—THE PARABLE.

This parable should be studied in connection with the whole group of which it forms but a part. Especially ought the student to compare Mark's account of it with the fuller statement of the seven given in

Matt. xiii. The parable of the sower is intended to show not only the mystery of the working of the truth in the human heart, as the seed germinates and brings forth fruit in and out of the ground, but especially, also, to suggest the opposition which the kingdom of God meets with from the human heart itself. Still further, it teaches us that the human will must work voluntarily in connection with the truth of God, in order to bring about the saving effects of the grace of God. A careless and indifferent hearer of the word can not be benefited by the truth; a superficial, shallow-minded hearer can receive no lasting benefit from the truth, though at first such an one may give great promise of salvation; a divided heart can bring forth nothing to perfection; and, finally, only a good, true-hearted, honest, and sincere heart—one that hears, embraces, and gives place to the truth—will or can become identified with the truth and bring forth a harvest of life and righteousness. We have here, as in Matthew, the three great factors, viz.: the sower, the seed, and the soil. Especial prominence is given to the soil—that is, to the human heart, on and into which the seed is sown. The sower, of course, is our Lord himself, who is and always has been the revealer of truth, speaking out from himself in olden times through prophets and by all the types and ritual shadows of by-gone dispensations; who finally came himself and gave, face to face, instruction to the world, and has ever since been scattering his good seed by the mouth of apostles and teachers, whom he has successively raised up and sent to the uttermost parts of the earth with his message of life and love. The seed, of course, is that “word of truth”—the “incorruptible seed” by which men are begotten to God, and which liveth and abideth forever.” (Jas. i, 18; I. Pet. i, 23.) Jesus, himself, is the substance of his own word; for after all it is not the acceptance of the word of God *about* Christ, but the reception of Christ himself into our hearts and lives, that brings forth “children of the kingdom.” (Matt. xiii, 38.) The soil is that religious nature of man that is reached through the intelligence and will. All men are capable of receiving life from God through Jesus Christ, though no man is capable of originating or developing spiritual life out of himself. Life is in the seed, and not in the soil. No amount of self-culture can make a man a child of God. The harvest of life and salvation must first be sown *into* the ground before it can be reaped *off* it. The four effects described in this parable are not intended to teach that only one fourth of those who hear the word are savingly brought to God, but only to set forth the condition and attitude of the heart toward the truth necessary to salvation, and to illustrate and explain

those spiritual phenomena witnessed among men who, though hearing the word, come short of salvation.

1.—The wayside hearer.—The Gospel is to be preached to every creature; is to be broadcasted over the whole field of humanity. Jesus is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He is the Saviour of all men, though especially of them that believe. "A talent was not withheld from him who buried it in the ground. A Judas was among them that believed." The sower scatters the seed broadcast, and some falls on the beaten pathway, or on the wayside, made hard and impervious by the tread of many feet. It does not get in—finds no opportunity to root itself—lies neglected and exposed, and is finally caught away by the birds of the air. So many persons hear and receive the grace of God in vain—in vain, because they make no place for it in their hearts. Their lives are filled or hardened by other things, and Christ is shut out as he was from the inn in which there was no place for him. These wayside hearers are those who are so taken up with other interests and pleasures, that they are indifferent to either the claim or call of God. They have surrendered their lives to business, to worldly ambitions, to pleasures, and to every earthly interest, so that their hearts have been trodden down hard by the steady tramp through them of the feet of these things. They hear the word as a man hears in a dream. They do not attend to it. It is a mere sound that has no meaning in it to them. If you ask them, "What think ye of Christ?" they reply by saying that they have not thought at all. He is not personal to them at all. It is a common thing to meet men and women who have been church-goers all their lives, and who tell you with the blandest manner, when you speak to them about their souls, that they have never really given the matter any serious thought. No impression of truth has been made upon their hearts. They are indifferent to it all, though keenly alive to and intelligent concerning a score or a hundred earthly interests. They are sometimes called "Gospel-hardened," but this is a great mistake. They are world-hardened. They are like the mill-owner who had given half the money required to build a stately church upon the services of which he attended, and who, when asked what he thought of the sermon of dedication, to which he had been outwardly listening, said: "The fact is, I did not hear what the pastor was saying. I could not help thinking all through the service, as I looked at the spacious proportions of this edifice, if it was a cotton mill how many spindles I could set up in it." The man was mill-hardened. A lady confessed to me once that, during the sermon, though she heard the words of it and understood the theme as I discussed it, she had been planning for a dinner party that

she was to give during the week. Here was a heart society-hardened. I knew another man who acknowledged that during the sermon he had been mentally making a note of the men whom he noticed in the congregation, and arranged in his own mind how and when he would see them in order to induce them to take out policies in a great life insurance company of which he had recently been made the local agent. Thus do men harden their hearts and become wayside hearers.

It is startling to note that in this connection our Lord says that when they have thus heard without taking heed to the word, "Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts." It is not that they forget, or that the impressions which may have been made fade away, the truth is caught away—taken away by the active interference of Satan, that enterprising and malicious enemy of God and of the souls of men. The man who neglects the word of God is helped to forget it by the evil spirit from beneath, as really as the man who heeds the word is quickened and helped by the good Spirit from above. "As seed is only safe from the fowls of the air when it is buried in the soil, so is the word of life only safe against the rapacity of hell when it has sunk down into our hearts." How significant the warning, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." And again: "Take heed how you hear." A man is shadowed by the Spirit of God or the spirit of evil, as he attends to or neglects the word of God which he hears.

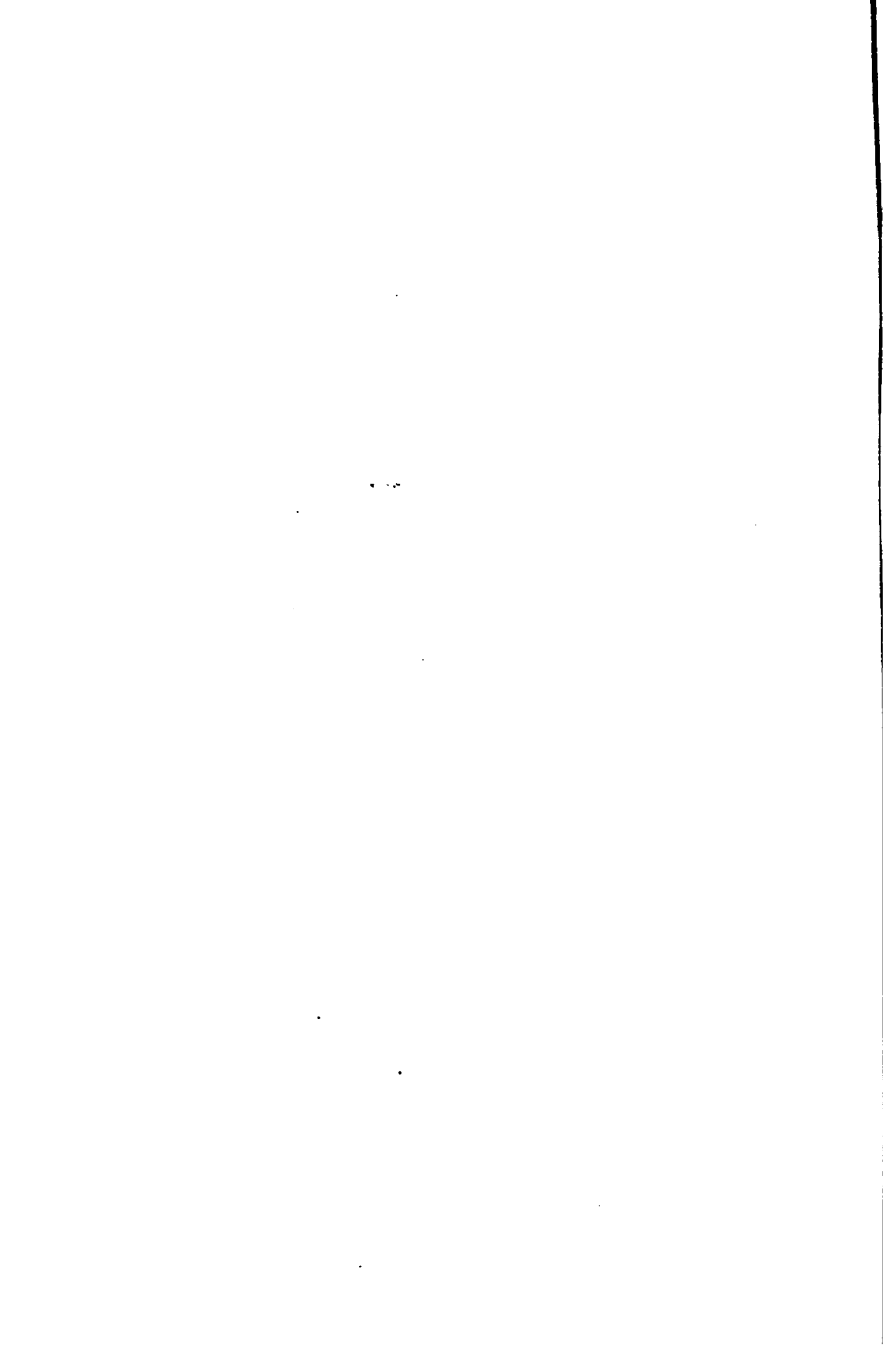
2.—The stony ground hearers.—These are the shallow, superficial, easily credulous hearers. In those stony fields there was often a ledge of rock jutting out from the hillside or starting up from beneath, over which a thin coating of soil had gathered. On this thin soil some seed fell, and because of the added heat held by the rock it quickly sprang up; but because of the thinness of the soil not much moisture could be stored, and what little there was quickly evaporated by the same heat that gave the seed so sudden a start. Scorched by the sun, and without deepness of earth, the promising blade quickly perished. There are shallow, emotional souls, who do not deeply consider the great truths of salvation, who give no profound consideration to the matter of sin, who think little of character. They are caught by some sudden fear of hell or moved by some vague hope of heaven, and eagerly embrace that phase of the Gospel which proclaims forgiveness of sins and promises the glory of heaven. Of trials, afflictions, and temptations they have made no account. The flowery beds of ease of a poet's imagination is their idea of being a Christian. They have not counted the cost. They have not thought of fighting a good fight of faith; of running, with patience, the race set before them; of enduring

hardness as good soldiers; of reaping peaceable fruits of righteousness after a sowing of divinely ordered chastisements. No thought of self-denial or cross-bearing discipleship has come to them. To them Christianity is a kind of holiday excursion from earth to heaven. So that when these things come, they are at once surprised and offended. They say God is unkind, and that it is not just that they should be tried or disciplined, and so, like the Galatians, they run well for a season and then fall out by the wayside. Like the scribe who would follow, but turned back when the Saviour promised him not so much as a nest, as the birds have, or a hole, as the foxes have; or like the young man who would be perfect, and yet went away sorrowful when he heard that to be a disciple of Christ he must be ready to sell what he had and give to the poor, these stony ground hearers fall away before the first breath of trial or experience of roughness. They were ready to go on dress parade, but not to face the enemy in the open field and lay down their lives, if need be, for their Master and the kingdom of heaven. Such need to consider our Lord's words: "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and come after me."

3.—The thorny ground hearers.—Here are those of the divided heart. They are ready for heaven, but still do not want to give up the earth. They appreciate the joys of salvation, but are not willing to part with the pleasures of the world. They would gladly lay up treasure in heaven, but still would hold on to and trust in uncertain riches. In fact, they attempt that impossible performance of trying to serve God and Mammon. They do not go clear over to the Lord's side. The result is, that having this double mind and divided heart, they are unstable in all their ways. The good seed is choked by their worldliness; the heavenly life is strangled by the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, if they have enough to trust in, and the desire for other things than those which become a single-hearted Christian. They may be saved as Lot was, so as by fire; they may be on the foundation, but their life building "is wood, hay, and stubble." They bring forth no fruit unto perfection. The cares of this world are the thorns that choke the poor Christian's life; the love of money and the passion for gain choke the rich Christian's life; the love of pleasure and lust for other things choke the worldly Christian's life. The only cure for this strangling danger is in utter consecration to God.

4.—The good ground hearers.—These are they that hear the word with serious earnestness, receive it and give themselves up to it, who at once discount the life and the world that now is, in favor of that which is to come. Like the patriarchs of old, they see the prom-

ises from afar, embrace them, and confess that they are pilgrims and strangers. Receiving the word by faith into honest hearts, they set about serving God in earnest, and bring forth according to their gifts and opportunities, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold. It has been well said, that while faithfulness and fruitfulness are never "the conditions in the Gospel by which life is earned, they are always the test by which it is proved." Works do not bring about faith, but real faith always works for God. The fruit of righteousness is the final proof of a pure Christian life. Let us close our study to-day by recalling again our Lord's words: "He that hath ears to hear let him hear;" and each one ask himself the question: "To which class of hearers do I belong? Am I a careless, world-hardened, superficial, emotional, divided, and double-minded hearer; or am I an honest-hearted, thoughtful, whole-souled disciple of Christ?"



LESSON VI.

THE FIERCE DEMONIAK.—Mark v, 1-20.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.—Mark v, 19.

And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. (For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.) And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand,) and were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind; and they were afraid. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.—Mark v, 1-20.

The strange and awful story that occupies our thought in this study has been the subject of very much discussion and controversy. Some have supposed that its introduction into the Gospel narrative is without authority. But as it appears not alone in Mark's vivid Gospel, but also in the more formal Gospel of Matthew (viii), and also in the

critical Gospel of Luke (viii), we must conclude that it is as authentic as the accounts of many other strange and wonderful incidents in the course of our Lord's ministry on earth, associated as it was with men, angels, and devils, and with all the powers of nature. Beside, there is no *a priori* reason for rejecting this story as being fabulous or merely allegorical. No candid reader can turn from the perusal of the Bible, and especially the New Testament narrative, without being convinced that the existence of a personal *devil* and an innumerable company of personal *demons* was not only believed by the people, but certified to by our Lord himself. It is idle, without overthrowing the entire story of Jesus and his ministry, to deny the reality of his interview and conflict with Satan in the wilderness, and his subsequent encounter with the demons who had taken possession of men and women for their hurt and destruction. If these demons were mere creatures of the imagination, then Jesus himself must have been a victim of the common delusion or superstition of the country or a deliberate conniver at the delusion which he used to still further delude the people (which is not thinkable), or we must conclude that the writers of these Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, were either grossly deluded and deceived themselves, or else deliberate impostors playing upon the fears and fancies of an ignorant and superstitious people. But we can not accept any such theory without abandoning as false and puerile the entire Gospel story. On the other hand, there is no more difficulty in accepting as true the existence of the devil and the demons than the existence of angels or any other spiritual beings. Nor is there any more mystery in connection with supernatural beings, either embodied intelligences as the angels are, or disembodied intelligences as the devil and the demons are, than in our own being. It is the most unreasonable of all positions to take, that man is the only rational and spiritual being in the universe, and that he only can have any connection with this world. We know enough to know that this world (the earth) is physically closely associated with, affected by, and dependent upon other planets. Our light and heat come from afar to us, our storms and possibly our pestilences are bred by forces not native to the earth. Why, then, should we assume as being irrational or improbable—much less impossible—the fact that the sentient world, man or brutes (the swine), are affected by other spiritual influences than those which pass from one man to another, or from one order of intelligence to another? We know how one mind dominates other minds, how one person influences another, to evil as well as to good; why should we doubt the ability of other personalities than those of men to influence men for evil and for good? If the angels are “ministering spirits sent

forth to minister unseen to those who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. x, 14), why may there not be evil spirits (demons) sent forth by the prince of devils to torment and afflict men and seek to destroy them? Shall we assume that man is the only devil in the universe, that in him, and in him alone, is there an abyss of wickedness and uncleanness? We do not know moral evil except as associated with personality; but are we to assume that man is the only possible personality? If it is urged that the existence of devils or demons is inconsistent with the notion of one Supreme and Good God who is over all, we may counter that by noting the fact that the existence of moral evil in the world is just as inconsistent. Evil and unclean spirits are not more difficult to conceive of than evil itself. Grant that the whole question of moral evil is to a certain large extent involved in almost impenetrable mystery, it is not more than our very being itself. We live in a world of mystery both physical and moral—we are ourselves the greatest of mysteries. If the question of how a legion of unclean spirits could inhabit a human soul presents itself, we must only answer we do not know; but neither do we know how a human soul can inhabit and control a human body—"by what strange link a thought contracts a sinew or transmits itself into a word or deed," or how, by the mysterious action of the organ of speech upon the air and thence upon the sensitive drum of the ear and the connecting nerves that reach the brain, one man telephones his expressed thought to and through the material brain of another man to his inner and immaterial consciousness. Consciousness, thought, and personality are so closely identified that we can not conceive of one without the other. We, as conscious, thoughtful personalities, are, in a sense, constantly possessing and being possessed by each other. While preserving my own individuality and personality, I am yet possessed by the thoughts of, not one, but a score or a hundred other personalities. The boundary line between these phenomena and that of the possession of a human soul by even a legion of devils, is so thin that it is not difficult to accept it as being not only possible, but probable. The possession of the swine by the demons is only a subdivision of the same subject.

The appalling fact brought to our notice in this connection is evidently not a normal condition of things, but an extraordinary and unusual occurrence, and the joy of it is that there has come One into the world who even by the devils themselves is recognized as Master, and he has with authority commanded those unclean spirits to come out of men and remanded them to their own domain, the dark abyss of hell. Whether men are now possessed by devils, may be a question; but if they are, we should not be surprised. There are wicked-

nesses and crimes, there are manias and madnesses so awful among men, that we would rather attribute them to the malicious workings of wicked and unclean spirits than to the normal operations of fallen and depraved human nature. We Christians believe that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate in our consciousness the movement of his Divine Personality from that of our own, especially when we are acting in harmony with his holy character. It is, therefore, not improbable that "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" does also dwell in men who have not taken refuge in Christ, by sending forth his ministers (the demons) to take up their abode in the souls of such to influence them in their choice and actions. I have introduced this somewhat lengthy discussion in advance of the examination of the story in detail, in order that we may get at the great practical lessons that are suggested to us, without complicating them with the question of demonology that so strongly pervades the whole incident.

THE UNHAPPY DEMONIAK.

Without going into the geographical questions involved in deciding the place of this conflict between Christ and the demons, let it suffice to say that it was a border region belonging to Palestine, and into which there had come a large incursion of Gentiles from the countries lying adjacent to this eastern limit of the Jewish land. "A mixed race was there, indifferent to religion, rearing great herds of swine, upon which the law looked askance, but the profits of which they held so dear, that they would choose to banish a divine ambassador, and one who had released them from an incessant peril, rather than be deprived of them." The immediate locality where our Lord met the demoniak was probably on the south-eastern shore of the lake of Galilee. Jesus coming into this world-ridden, devil-dominated land, among these gross and sensuous people, is a fitting illustration of that grace of God which by him has appeared among a sinful race, bringing peace, deliverance, and salvation. The treatment he received at their hands is not unlike that which he still receives from the world, which still prefers devils, swine, and profits to Christ and his salvation. Jesus being himself banished or sent away, he still leaves one to testify to his goodness, grace, and power, is a suggestion of the method by which God is now carrying on the work of his grace in a world that rejected and crucified his Son. Mark's characteristic is vivid and dramatic writing rather than chronological order, hence we are led to believe that as soon as Jesus landed he beheld the

wretched demoniac among the rocky tombs down by the lake shore; and knowing the nature of his affliction, he immediately commanded the leader and captain of the legion of demons to come out of the man. It was this command that attracted his attention and brought him to his feet, swayed both by hope and fear. Let us look at the details of the story concerning this man.

1.—He is possessed by an unclean spirit.—It would seem from this statement that there was but one, and yet we learn further on that there was a great host of them. This apparent discrepancy is accounted for if we bear in mind the fact that this legion of demons seem to have been under the command or leadership of one ruling spirit, who acted for all and spoke for all. Sin, which is the characteristic of fallen man, is at once one and many. David speaks of his offense as being at once sin, transgression, and iniquity. Sin is the master passion, which manifests itself in a legion of forms. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man." (Matt. xv, 19, 20, compare with Gal. v, 19-21.) These are some of the fleshly lusts which find a home for themselves in the hearts of men who dwell in sin and are unreconciled to God. How terrible is the thought that the man—you and I—whom God made to dwell in himself, should thus become the habitation of these demon vices and passions. The demon possessing this man is called an "unclean spirit," and so does our Lord speak of the sin that has its seat in our hearts as a defiling principle.

2.—He was dominated by the unclean spirit.—The demon who possessed him also dominated him. The man was not the master of himself, nor had he power to expel the unclean spirit. He must needs do what the devils would, and not what he would himself. And the chief horror of it all was that his own will and his own affections came to coincide with the will and vile passions of the demons. It is so with all who are living in sin. Sin is master. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" (Rom. vi, 16.) It is only when we are delivered by Jesus Christ (Rom. vii, 25) that we are made free from sin and delivered from its dominion. (John viii, 34; Rom. vi, 13, 14, 18.) How few realize this awful bondage, even when the master sin leads them into the very tombs and drives them in madness to the very verge of self-destruction.

3.—He was a torment to himself and a terror to his neighbors.—"And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones." In vain had his

neighbors tried to control him, even by fetters of iron; he was beyond control, and a terror to all about him. Dashing himself against the sharp rocks and bruising himself against the hard stones, he was an awful sufferer. So does sin, when it has brought forth a full harvest in a man, torment him and make him a terror. It seems to me that in this man we have a little picture of what hell will be to those who are finally given over to that dark abode of the devil and his angels. We do not see sin now, except in rare cases, in complete and desperate possession of men; they are not all so fully dominated as this poor man was by the demons, but where one demon possesses us a legion may come, and in the end will come. If the devil can hold a man by one demon—even though he be a soft and refined one—it answers his purpose just as well as if he holds him by a legion. If a man is held in allegiance to the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience by one or two sins, though they be refined and genteel, the sins of the parlor and of cultivated society, it answers as well as if he were bound by all the sins of which the human heart is capable.

4.—He had his dwelling among the tombs.—"The wages of sin is death," and the devil is he "who has the power of death." (Rom. vi, 23; Heb. ii, 14.) It was the most natural place in the world for the demons to take their wretched captive. It was on the way to the abyss, their own dark and dreadful abode. The abode of every sinful man and woman is among the dead. "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." "Awake, thou that sleepest; arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light." (Eph. v, 14.) Paul describes his own condition before he found deliverance in Christ as one having a dead body bound to him. Sin and death always go together. "Christ, by rescuing souls from out of Satan's power, saves the living from among the dead." It is a dreadful thing to see so many all around us whose dwelling is among the tombs.

5.—His double personality.—We are struck with this strange fact throughout the entire interview. Sometimes the wretched man speaks out of his own individual personality, but mostly it seems to be the chief of the demons who takes entire possession of his organs of speech, dominating his personality, and sometimes the whole filthy herd of demons seem to speak at once, using the man's voice; the personal pronouns in the narrative are mixed up. This strange phenomenon is, after all, not so strange. It is said by Paul, that before he found Christ he had a double personality: "It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me." (Rom. vii, 8, 11, 17.) In these passages he ascribes to sin a kind of personality which dominated his personality; so

also, when he became a Christian he speaks in the same way, only of the domination of Christ: "I live, and yet not I, but Christ, liveth in me." (Gal. ii, 19, 20.) Here he declares himself to have become dead to the law, but alive to God. We only have to look about us to see people who are so dominated by a crowd of contending passions, lusts, evil habits, and sinful practices, that it may be said they have almost lost their personality. Oftentimes, when a man is drunk or carried away by anger, jealousy, or envy, he says and does things concerning which he afterward declares: "I was not myself at the time." The prodigal son was in such a case until he "came to himself." So is every man until he is rescued from sin by Christ. His contention of contradictory personalities is seen in the contradictory action of the man. When Christ commanded the devils to come out of him, "he ran and worshiped him." So far it seems to have been the man himself, inspired by a momentary hope of deliverance; but no sooner was he at the feet of Jesus than the chief demon takes possession and cries out: "What have I to do with thee," or rather, "What hast thou to do with me, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee, by God, that thou torment me not." The man ran and worshiped, but the devil spake. Perhaps in this moment the man lost his own individual consciousness in that of the demons, and was haunted with the demons' fear. So do we see these strange contradictions in men who come under the power of the Gospel. Many a convicted sinner acts, at times, more like a devil than a human being longing for salvation. But Jesus knows all this, and though the devils tear a man before they come out of him, yet when Christ commands they must come out.

6.—He is clothed and in his right mind.—Passing by a question suggested by the prayer of the demons to be permitted to enter the swine, we take a look through to the end, and see this demoniac, so long and so cruelly afflicted, "*sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind.*" What a change is this! What a blessed change! But this is what Jesus does for sinners. He brings peace to them, and them into peace. The wild demoniac is quieted; he has found peace at the feet of Christ; he is clothed who before had been stripped and naked. So does Christ clothe us with his righteousness as with a garment who, aforetime, were in the nakedness of sin. He was in his right mind. He had come to himself, now that the demons were cast out. No man is really in his right mind until once more his whole being finds its true center in God. The mind of man runs wild when it breaks away from God. That is a blessed place and a blessed state which is found at the feet of Jesus Christ, who casts out the demons and heals and clothes our torn and naked souls.

II.—THE DEMONS AND THE SWINE.

This portion of our lesson is not of great importance, yet we give it a passing notice.

1.—The demons' recognition of Jesus as the Son of God.—Here is a confession from demons of the Sonship of Christ before that one of Peter's (Matt. xvi), and in almost the identical words. But yet how different were they! This one was made in terror; a devil's confession, full of hatred and fear. That one was a sinner's confession, inspired by the Father in heaven and full of blessedness. In the wilderness Satan had challenged his Sonship: "If thou be the Son of God." Here, among the tombs, the demons, with less restraint, give up the point, and only beseech him to leave them alone, or at least not at once to send them back into hell before their time—that is, the time appointed for their final and eternal imprisonment. (See Matt. viii, 29; Mark i, 24; Luke viii, 28, 31; Heb. x, 27; Jude 6; Rev. xx, 14.)

2.—The demons' prayer.—There was no lack of fervor in it. "I adjure thee, by God." Devils believe and tremble; they do not pray for salvation, but only that they may have respite from their torment. It makes one shudder to hear men in blasphemy pray God to "damn their souls," when we think how devils pray only for a little respite from such a damnation. The presence of the Holy One was a torment to them. They dreaded his power as well as shrank from his holiness. And yet the abyss (Luke viii, 28), their true home, was dreadful to them. Escaping from hell, they would take possession of men, and cast out from men, they would even go into swine rather than back to hell; and yet men who may be delivered both from demons and hell will not come to Christ, that they may be healed.

3.—The herd of swine.—Seeking a place for themselves, they chose a herd of swine—those filthy Assyrian brutes—as being a better abode for them than none. These wretched, disembodied spirits, always seeking rest and embodiment, hoped that they might yet remain in that country, even in the swine. They seem to have been unable to control them as they did the man, but were carried down into the sea, and doubtless thence into the abyss they so much dreaded. The criticism that is made against Jesus for thus, by his consent, wantonly destroying so much property, is of no force whatever. First, the swine were a species of property that it was illegal to hold and rear for food, as it was unlawful to eat their flesh. Second, being Lord of creation, it was his right to do as he knew best with his own; he who beats down the corn in the field by hail or tornado, may surely engulf a herd of beastly swine in the sea and allow the devils to come to grief by carry-

ing out their own desire, and at the same time fulfill his will. Property that is unlawfully gotten may be righteously destroyed. The final judgment is always having its initial fulfillments in time. It was certainly worth the loss of the swine to give to the saved man an ocular demonstration that the tormenting fiends were gone clean away from him, and through the swine and the sea out of the country itself.

III.—THE UNGRATEFUL GADARENES.

Jesus had come to their shore to deliver the poor sinner and to drive the demons out of their land, and had they received him, to save them from a worse fate than that which had befallen their townsman. But how did they receive him? Not with gladness and faith, as did the Samaritans, who went out to see him on the report of the woman who had been saved from her sin while talking with him at the well. They came out in a body and, while deferentially addressing him—because they were scared at the supernatural power he manifested—they besought him to depart out of their coasts. They saw the demoniac “sitting, clothed, and in his right mind,” but they also saw that a herd of two thousand swine were lost to them. The loss of the swine was of more importance to them than the salvation of the man. Instead of arguing salvation to themselves from the one fact, they only feared further temporal loss to themselves from the other. They decided that it were better to save their swine and lose their souls than to lose their swine and save their souls. Is not this the secret of much of the opposition we see to Jesus in the world now—is he not rejected because men and women fear, if they accept him, they will be deprived of the profits of some unlawful traffic, or deprived of some flesh-pleasing but soul-destroying pleasure? Therefore, they beseech Jesus to depart from their coasts, and bid Christians to let them alone and not disturb them with the claims and grace of God in Christ Jesus. Peter once said to the Lord, “Depart from me,” but this was because his conscience was awakened and he felt himself unworthy. But these said, “Depart from our coasts,” because they were scared, and feared they would lose their worldly goods. Why do you reject Jesus?

Their prayer was granted. For “the Gospel, which is free to all, was not to be forced upon any. But how much did they blindly fling away, who refused the presence of the meek and lowly Giver of rest unto souls, and chose to be denied as strangers whom he never knew, in the day when every eye shall see him.” Of what advantage will their swine and their unholy profits be to *them* then? Of what advantage will your profits and pleasures, for which you have rejected Christ, be to *you*, then?

IV.—THE HEALED DEMONIAK'S PRAYER DENIED.

It was most natural for the healed demoniak to desire to go with Jesus and be with him; on the other hand, it is easily perceived why Jesus did not grant his request. Doubtless the man's sense of gratitude and his newly-awakened love for his great Benefactor, prompted him to follow him and be always near him. Perhaps he had a still lingering fear that if he should be left to himself, the demons might somehow get back to him and again enslave him, while in the immediate presence of Jesus he would feel safer. Then the country was abhorrent to him, and he might gladly rejoice in the prospect of leaving the scenes of his wretchedness. All these motives would operate. Why should not the Saviour suffer this grateful and ardent disciple to follow him as did others who had been healed and saved? Many reasons suggest themselves. First: It may have been best for his faith to learn that Jesus was as able to save from afar as when near at hand. Many of us need to learn this important lesson. Sometimes Jesus seems to be asleep, as when in the boat during the storm, and heedless of our need; sometimes he is far away on the mountain whilst we are toiling in rowing, and beyond his reach; but in both cases he taught his disciples that he was able to save in the moment of extremity. Second: Jesus, who had been so rudely repulsed by the citizens of that devil and swine-ridden country, would in pity still leave them a witness of his grace if, haply, they might yet turn to him in their hearts and be saved; and who so good a witness as this very man whom they had known, and whose perfect restoration could not be gainsayed? Third: There were those of his own household who needed him. He may have been both husband and father, and the first duty of a young Christian is to be truer and better at home than ever before. Christianity does not release us from home duties, but makes them more sacred in our eyes, or ought to; then he had a mission of testimony to them. "Go home to thy friends" (they will be rejoiced to see thee healed), "and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." How well and truly he fulfilled this home missionary commission, the lesson tells us. He not only told of all that Jesus had done for him, to his immediate friends, but with burning love and zeal he blazed the Gospel abroad in the ten cities of the district. Let us thus seek to show our gratitude, not by gratifying our own selfish love for close companionship with the Lord, but by spreading the news of him abroad among those with whom our testimony will serve the best end.

LESSON VII.

THE TIMID WOMAN'S TOUCH.—Mark v, 25-34.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Be not afraid ; only believe.—Mark v, 36.

And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up ; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes ? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me ? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole ; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.—Mark v, 25-34.

Expelled by the unbelief of the Gadarenes from their country, Jesus, leaving the rescued demoniac for a witness behind him, returns to the western shore of the lake, where he finds a great multitude awaiting him. Whilst in conversation, if not in controversy, with the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist (Matt. ix, 10-17), a ruler of a synagogue came in haste and fell at his feet, and besought his help for a dear child lying at the point of death. While Jesus was on the way to the house of Jairus, the multitude thronging and pressing upon him, a poor woman, greatly afflicted and in the despair of faith, creeps up behind him and touches the hem of his garment. The effect of her timid touch was the instantaneous healing of her disease. The after consequence of her faith was to bring her out from among the crowd into an open confession of her faith, and the assurance from Jesus of her perfect restoration to health. The story is full of precious teaching to those who have eyes to see.

I.—THE SAD CASE OF THE WOMAN.

Tradition has it that this woman was a Gentile ; but whether Jew or Gentile, it does not matter ; the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon him. This much is certain : she was in a very sad case.

Her disease was gradually wasting her life away; it was, in so far as human aid was concerned, a hopeless one, for she had exhausted every remedy which the physicians of that age could prescribe, and besides suffering much needless pain from their remedies and operations, she had wasted all her substance in paying their bills (not an unfrequent experience with physicians of our day). Her disease was one that rendered her unfit for all social life, and, indeed, rendered her ceremonially unclean, so that she was practically excluded from society of all kinds. (Lev. xv, 25-27.) This, then, was her case: great physical suffering; ceremonial uncleanness, which was practically perpetual; her substance all spent; her life despaired of; and added to all this the mental and spiritual anxiety which it necessarily entailed. Yet her condition was not so bad as that of those who, though they may not be diseased in body, are suffering from the malady of sin, which is more loathsome, more incurable, and more fraught with distressing consequences to the sinner, both in this life and in the life to come. We pity the case of those who are thus sorely afflicted in their bodies, while we are careless of the worse condition of those who are afflicted in their souls. There are a multitude of sinners who fly to physicians upon the first manifestation of any bodily disease, but who allow sin to go on and increase in its deadly and wasting power, and never give a thought to their cure. And what shall it profit, even though earthly physicians could finally cure our bodies, if sin is allowed to destroy our souls; for a soul that is given up to sin is destroyed whether it be on earth or in hell. Yet when a sinner is really awakened to a knowledge of sin he, like this woman, seeks cure by applying to impotent physicians. Happy is such an one when he finds that it is impossible for man to cure himself or anybody else of sin, and turns to Jesus Christ, the only physician for the soul, and, for that matter, for the body also.

II.—THE GREAT FAITH OF THE WOMAN.

The faith of this woman has been spoken of as "little faith"; that is, the expression is often heard: "If you have only faith enough to touch the hem of his garment, it will save you." A closer inspection of the story will reveal the fact that the woman's faith was of an extraordinary kind. Perhaps there is something in the manner of her approach which may give occasion to a cold critic to condemn. For instance, even so careful a commentator as Matthew Henry speaks of her as "stealing a cure." Some will say she ought to have come boldly and openly asked for her cure; some will say that she, having been cured, ought not to have thought of stealing away without confessing it;

others will say that her faith was superstitious, in that she had a conceit that she might get health by touching his garment—as it were by contagion—and without the Lord's consciousness; and still others might say that she had violated both law and propriety in coming amongst a multitude of people when she was ceremonially unclean. But such criticisms are captious rather than well grounded. Suppose there were defects in her method of faith, is it not better that she should have come with imperfect ideas and faulty method than not to have come at all? And as for violation of ceremonial law and the formal proprieties of life, or even of religion, what are these when they stand in the way of getting to Jesus? David flung over the ceremonial law when he sought forgiveness for his great sin (Ps. li), well knowing they were but shadows of the real substance; and our Lord himself broke the technical law of the Sabbath when he came to show man the real meaning of the rest of God. As for proprieties, our Lord was constantly breaking them, and even commending those who broke them, as in the case of the man let down through the roof of the house and the woman who kissed his feet and washed them with penitent tears which welled up from her heart. What our Lord loves is genuineness, not formality; and this woman had genuine faith. Moreover, it was very great faith, even so great that our Lord said: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." It is worth while to look at some of the particulars of her great faith.

1.—It was based on hearing.—"When she had heard of Jesus." This may mean both having heard of his wondrous power to heal the sick and of his gracious disposition toward the most unfortunate; and now that he was come within her reach, she determined to go to him. All faith comes by hearing. We do not know of Jesus and his mighty power to save by mathematical or scientific proof, but on the testimony of God's word (Rom. x, 17; I. John v, 9-11), and that of those who have had experience of the truth and power of the Gospel. (II. Cor. iv, 3-7). If we are to come to Jesus, we are not to wait for some uncontrollable impulse, but must take the testimony of the Gospel and act upon that, for "these things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name." (John xx, 31.)

2.—Her faith was an active one.—Having heard of Jesus, she came to him. In this she differed from many who, having heard of Jesus, do not go to him with their trouble, but sit idly still and wait for him to seek them out, as they say, by his Spirit and compel them to believe. "If I am to be saved," some say, "God will save me." Others say: "I hope that God will save me in his own good time."

But God's time is now, and his word is through Jesus Christ: "Who-soever will, let him come;" and again: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And again: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Real faith is always active. It is always a movement of the soul toward and onto God. Such was the faith of this woman.

3.—It was a heroic faith.—There were many difficulties in the way. Her case was a desperate one. She had already suffered many things, of many physicians, without receiving benefit. She had long ago been discouraged with repeated failures. She was weak with disease, and the way to him was somewhat difficult. There was a throng of strong men and women—a multitude pressing about him. How was she to reach him; how press her way in her enfeebled condition through that surging mass and get within touch of him? Her faith was of that heroic kind which characterized the four who brought the palsied man to Jesus, even when the press about the door was so great that no one could enter through it. Then, as has been said, she was ceremonially unclean; it would be a breach of law and a scandal to the righteous to go into a crowd of people in her condition. Yet, in spite of all this, she went. Moreover, observe the expression which is attributed to her: "If I may but touch his clothes I shall be whole." The "but" in this sentence emphasizes the virtue that she believed to be in him, and not in her touch. So great was her faith that she believed healing power would pass through his clothes to her. It was *his clothes* and not *her touch* upon which her faith rested. In this we see not only great, but very intelligent faith.

4.—It was a rational faith.—She evidently had carefully considered all she had heard concerning Jesus, weighed it in her mind, and had come to an intelligent conclusion. "She said." This was the summing up of the matter in her own mind. God is pleased with an intelligent, a rational faith; a faith that considers what he has said and all the testimony upon which the truth of the Gospel rests. "Come, now, let us reason together." "Why halt ye? If the Lord be God, then serve him." Moses, when he had come to years, and had weighed the whole matter, decided intelligently to forsake the riches of Egypt and cast in his lot with the people of God. True faith is not credulity that takes up with the Gospel in a blind and unthinking way, but an intelligent decision, based on facts.

5.—It was a modest faith.—That which some have denominated a timid or surreptitious action, seems to me, rather, to have been dictated by modesty. Her disease was one that naturally made her shrink from publicity. Besides, her appearance in public would have scandal-

ized the formally religious people who were about the Lord. Her thought was to avoid observation and making a scene, rather than to "steal a blessing." Besides, he was on his way to the house of Jairus, and she, a poor, unfortunate woman, would not detain him and the whole multitude by making herself and her trouble known. She had such faith in him that she believed she might get her blessing and slip away without observation. Faith is not ostentatious; it does not parade itself before men when there is no need. Of course, when a man or woman seeks to hide himself or herself from the world because he or she is not willing to be known as a disciple of Christ, it is different. Our Lord will have no secret disciples when secrecy is sought because there is unwillingness to be known as his disciple by a confession of him before men. But this woman's case was, I am sure, different from that. In the subsequent open interview with the Lord, in which he showed her to the whole multitude, he administered no rebuke to her, but in tenderest terms commended her before them.

6.—It was an efficient faith.—She had no sooner touched the hem of his garment than she was instantaneously and miraculously cured of her malady. "She felt in her body that she was healed of that plague." Efficient faith now brings divine grace to bear upon the soul as this woman's efficient faith brought the power of God to bear on her body. The proof of faith is in that it effects cure. The man who says he has faith and yet does not in himself know that he is healed of sin and does not present a healed soul in the actual fruits of the spirit, is most likely, indeed, we may say, is certainly deceived. Faith is not an inoperative sentiment, but a vitalized power, made efficient in healing by reason of its union with the saving and healing object of its trust. Faith is that which makes substantially real in ourselves the things believed or taken hold of.

III.—CHRIST'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE WOMAN'S TOUCH.

There is a beautiful correspondence in the consciousness of the woman and that of Jesus. She immediately felt in her body that she was healed; he immediately knew in himself that virtue had gone out of him. How this lifts the whole transaction of salvation out of the realm of blind force or mere personal and individual imagination! In every case of salvation there are two consciousnesses or personalities affected. The believing sinner who comes to Jesus acts intelligently, and the Saviour to whom he comes is personally intelligent in the virtue which he yields in response to the touch of faith. His saving power is not a

mere storehouse that remains open to any one as a fire which sends out its heat to all who come, but is unaffected by many or few, and not at all by the individual relation of the comer. Salvation is an intensely personal transaction between the believer and Jesus Christ. The sinner knows when he stretches out the hand of faith, and the Saviour knows when he is touched by faith. Perhaps the woman did not know that her touch would affect his consciousness. This she could not know by her own consciousness. We do not feel that Christ feels when we go to him, but it is immensely comforting to us that he thus declares that he is moved by our touch. Touched by every feeling of our infirmity, by the sensitiveness of his all-embracing divine sympathy, but personally touched by our personal touch when faith brings us directly, personally and specifically, to him for help.

1.—Christ's care for one soul, and she a poor, unfortunate one.—He was on his way to the house of a rich and distinguished man. The whole multitude knew where he was going and for what he was making the journey, but not one of them knew of the presence in the throng of this one poor unfortunate. But he knew, he felt her touch, and he cared for her as really as for Jairus and his daughter. He had time to stop on the way and attend, with the fullness of loving care, to the necessities of the afflicted sufferer who had ventured to trust him. She would have been content to have received her blessings and gone away without any further notice, but not he. He would complete by yet more grace that which had been begun by her intelligent faith. He would put honor on this obscure woman's faith as really as upon the more open faith of the rich ruler.

2.—“Who touched my clothes?”—This was a surprising question to the disciples; they could not understand it. “Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, ‘Who touched me?’” How true it is that “the flesh crowds, but faith touches.” There is a vast difference between thronging the Lord and touching him. The multitude thronged about him, but one unobserved soul in that throng touched him. Perhaps her touch was lighter than a feather's weight, but it had purpose and faith in it, while the multitude pushed, crowded, and jostled him, and yet he knew not that they touched him, or at least he did not observe it, because there was no meaning in their crowding. A multitude throng the house of God and listen to the words of the preacher, and go away as they came; but here and there a sinner, longing for salvation, creeps in among the crowd and, forgetting the preacher, hears the word of God, and thus touches the Lord Christ, and is healed. Neither the multitude nor his disciples knew of this silent and secret touch of faith; but the Master does, nor will he

let it go without being confirmed. It is a matter of unspeakable satisfaction that we have to do with infinite intelligence as well as infinite grace.

IV.—OPEN CONFESSION AND PUBLIC ASSURANCE.

Turning about, the Saviour casts his eyes upon the woman; he speaks to her and gives her better blessing than she had already received.

1.—The public confession.—Our Lord is not willing that faith should hide itself in the solitude of the sinner's consciousness. He will strengthen it by bringing it to the light of day in an open confession. The reason why our Lord requires open confession is not alone that he will be acknowledged, but that the believer may be strengthened thereby. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." There is a wondrous power in an open confession. The chances are all against the stability of faith that does not declare itself. So when the woman was detected by his loving and benignant eyes, she immediately came before him and, prostrate there, unbosomed herself of all her trouble. She "told him all the truth." Her fear was not fright, but reverential awe and trembling gratitude that welled up in her heart. If he acknowledged her in the face of that throng of people, she would not deny him. Her secret was out by his action; she would no longer attempt to hide it from him nor the people. There is great propriety and great blessing in telling Jesus all the truth; all the truth of our trouble and all the truth of our faith. This confession led to much more than she dreamed of.

2.—His loving appellation.—This is the only case in the record of our Lord's ministry in which he so tenderly addressed a woman. "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole." Her misery and her faith drew from his guarded lips the tender and yet the lofty word, "Daughter." This, alone, should set at rest all criticism upon any supposed defect in her faith or unworthiness in her method. He approved, he commended; his heart, as well as his power, was touched by her. So may we bear ourselves toward him that he may say to us: "Son! Daughter!"

3.—The power of faith.—"Thy faith hath made thee whole." He did not say: "Thy touch hath made thee whole." It was not the touch of the hand, the physical contact, that won forth the healing virtue from him, but the faith that was back of the touch. Thank God! our faith can reach farther than our hands and is, after all, the potent agent in securing, not by merit but by ethical condition, the salvation which Jesus has to give to all. •

4.—**The open benediction.**—"Thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague." This was a better assurance to her than the "feeling in her own body that she was whole." So many Christians, as well as seekers after Christ, demand "feeling" as the only satisfactory grounds of assurance of salvation. But to the intelligent believer, one word from Jesus is worth a thousand times more for assurance than all frames and feelings, no matter how exquisite or delicious they may be. Had she nothing but her feeling, she might have been in doubt as to whether her cure were permanent; but now she had no more doubt. For had he not said, and said publicly, that she was cured; and had he not bidden her to go in the peace of that assurance, and into peace yet beyond in the pathway of her future life? So he bids us who have believed on him. Let us seek for assurance and peace in his word rather than in our religious sensations. His word changes not; it lives and abides forever, whereas our feelings are variable and changing, according to conditions of body and mind. "He that heareth MY WORD, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into the judgment; but is passed from death unto life." (John v, 24.)

LESSON VIII.

THE GREAT TEACHER AND THE TWELVE.—Mark vi, 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—And they went out and preached that men should repent.—Mark vi, 12.

And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching. And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into a house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.—Mark vi, 1-18.

Whether this visit to his own country—that is, to Nazareth—was his first visit (Luke iv) to the town where he had spent all his life, since returning from Egypt, a mere babe, or whether it was a second visit, there is some room for doubt, but I am inclined to believe that, disregarding all chronological arrangement, the visit recorded by Matthew (xiii, 54), Luke (iv, 16), and in our present lesson from Mark are the same. It is not material, however, whether this was a second or the first visit. At any rate, it is interesting that, having been rejected with cold and calculating unbelief by the people of Decapolis, Jesus turns with desire to his own town, where, doubtless, he had reason to expect sympathy and enthusiastic welcome; all the more that the fame of his mighty works must have preceded him. He had

recently demonstrated his mighty power in stilling the storm, casting out the legion of demons, healing the diseased woman, and raising the dead daughter of Jairus. We are therefore surprised and pained to find that, in his own town and among the people with whom he had been brought up, he received even less welcome than he did from the mongrel, swine-herding race of Gerassa; for they did but selfishly entreat him to leave their coasts lest his further stay among them would interfere with their traffic, but his own towns-people were filled with envy and jealous hatred, and would even have destroyed him. (Luke iv, 28, 29.)

I.—JESUS TEACHING IN NAZARETH.

We are led to believe that he spent one or two quiet days in his home town, perhaps in the privacy of the domestic circle with his mother and his half-brothers and sisters; and then quietly and naturally, when the Sabbath day was come he repaired to the synagogue and took the place of the teacher. Luke tells us that this was his custom even before his public baptism. But until now his teaching had never "been in power" (Luke iv, 32), for until now he had never taught in their synagogue with the special anointing of the Holy Ghost. Luke gives us the text of his discourse, but Matthew and Mark simply speak of its effect upon his hearers.

1.—The subject matter of his teaching.—We learn from Luke that he preached from a portion of Scripture recorded by Isaiah (lxi, 1), in which the outline of the Gospel of the grace of God was set before them, identifying himself with the prophecy. Then, passing over and commenting upon some criticisms which were made because he confined himself to teaching and not to working miracles as he had done in Capernaum, he indirectly rebukes his hearers for their unbelief, and intimates that it will be with them as it was with apostate Israel when God passed by them and healed only Naaman the Syrian, and raised up from the dead only the son of the widow of Sarepta. This intimation of God's favor to heathen maddened them, and they sought to kill him. We learn from the way in which this discourse was received by the people of Nazareth to appreciate how the teachings of Jesus are received by men to-day. That which pleased their fancy and came to them as with the sound of gracious favor, they received gladly; but that which pointed out sin and contained rebuke is rejected, and the faithful teacher is made the object of hatred. If we are to be blessed by the teachings of Christ, we must receive his rebukes as well as his gracious words. God's message to

us is both of grace and judgment. No man can receive the forgiveness of his sins until he is ready to confess them and the guilt of them.

2.—The wisdom and power of his teachings.—The people heard Jesus with astonishment and wonder. His wonderful works done in the surrounding towns and country had been heard of and were well attested, and now they heard with their own ears his astonishing wisdom. His words were equal to his works. They seem to have been filled with the same mighty power. "Whence hath this man these things, and what wisdom is this that is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?" The people had been accustomed to hear the Scriptures read and commented upon by the scribes, but there had been no power in their subtle refinements and abstruse reasonings; their eyes had never before been opened to see, and the veil had never before been taken off the word and the hidden wisdom of God shown to them. They had been familiar with the showy and ostentatious "good works" of the Pharisees, but they had never before seen or even heard of the sick being healed, devils cast out, storms of the lake quieted with a word, and the dead raised. His teachings astonished them; his works confounded them. These two wonders have ever since his coming into the world characterized the power of Jesus. Never man spake as he spake; and the marvelous grace and profound wisdom of his teachings have not lost any of their wonder as the ages have gone by. The world has increased in its wisdom, and in the stock of its knowledge, philosophical and scientific, but the world has not yet caught up with the wisdom of the words of Jesus. His teaching is as much in advance of the wisdom of this world to-day as it was in advance of the wisdom of the people of that little obscure Galilean town two thousand years ago. The teachings of sages and philosophers of this world are as tame beside the wisdom of Jesus now as they were then. It was a new kind, not after the manner of the scribes; and we may be sure that the poet Goethe was profoundly right when he said: "The human mind, no matter how much it may advance in intellectual culture, and in the extent and depth of the knowledge of nature, will never transcend the high moral culture of Christianity, as it shines and glows in the canonical Gospels." "Whatever may be the surprises of the future," says another of the critics (Renan), "Jesus will never be surpassed." And his works are like his teachings. For nearly two thousand years the mighty works of Jesus have kept pace with his wondrous teachings. His teaching has gone forth with regenerating power, opening the eyes of the blind, cleansing the consciences of men,

bringing peace to storm-tossed lives, casting out the demons of intemperance, lust, and selfishness, healing the sick and raising the dead in trespasses and sins to life and holiness. His words and his power go together. If he says to sinners: "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee," he adds with accompanying power: "Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine own house." (Mark ii, 5-12.) And the world stands amazed, and exclaims in spite of its unbelief: "We never saw it on this fashion." The astonished question still awaits an answer from men, even from the very men who put it: "Whence hath this man these things?" Ah, whence, indeed? Whence but from heaven? Whence except from the fact that he is both the wisdom and the power of God. Wisdom and power come out and down from God to instruct and save the sinfully ignorant and the sinfully dying and dead. If there be those who still reject him as the Christ, let them answer satisfactorily from whence Jesus of Nazareth had this wisdom and power. He did not learn it from men, neither did he receive it from men. His wisdom and power are not an evolution from something before disclosed in man. It is different both in substance and form. It is a new doctrine. (Mark i, 27.) He tells us whence he received it. "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." (John vii, 16.)

3.—How his teaching was received.—"And they were offended at him." There were two grounds of offense against him. One of them Mark does not allude to, but Luke does. They were offended because they did not like the doctrine. It unmasked their sin and selfishness; it showed them the hollowness and emptiness of all their own boasted wisdom and formal worship. It brought them face to face with God and the other world, and revealed the unsubstantiality of all those things which they held most dear. This is why men are offended at the doctrine of Jesus to-day. His doctrine turns the light of eternity upon the lives and actions of men; and they turn from that light because their deeds are evil and they love darkness, therefore, rather than light. Man constructs doctrines to suit himself; that will justify him in all his courses of selfishness and sin; that will enable him to devour widows' houses and live in sin while parading in the dead forms of a selfish Phariseism. Mark, however, passing by this reason which Luke brings out, tells us that their pride was hurt that this humble neighbor of theirs, this carpenter who had been reared in their midst, whose brothers and sisters were still among them, occupying lowly places, should display such wisdom and power. This they could not bear. Shall a carpenter, whose hands are hard with common

labor, set all our wisdom at naught and demonstrate our powerlessness? Must we, who have been until now the custodians of the wisdom of God, take our place at the feet of this mechanic, and learn of him? Must human rank and order of precedence be thus overthrown and go for nothing? This they could not abide. So it is with the world. Must the wise men of the world acknowledge that this Galilean knew more than the sages of Greece and the learned men of Europe; must the simple Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth outrank the wisdom of the scientific mind of the nineteenth century? Must we submit to have our wisdom turned into foolishness by the Gospel? Thus the haughty wisdom of the world is offended with the lowly but sure wisdom of heaven. The wisdom of Jesus and the mighty power of his Gospel fill them with astonishment. They can not refute it or explain it, but they will not accept it; therefore, they are scandalized by it, and seek to put contempt upon it by pointing to his lowly human origin and the meanness of his disciples, who became his heralds and expounders. But ought not the very fact that he was the lowly carpenter, who had never been to school to the scribes and doctors, have suggested to them that his wisdom and power were all the more remarkable? From the beginning God has been teaching the world that its wisdom is foolishness, and that it has always pleased him and still pleases him, "by the foolishness of preaching," to save them that believe. The whole history of God's revelation to man has been a surprise and offense to his pride and fancied wisdom.

4.—How Jesus met their criticism.—In answer to their angry rejection of his wisdom because they did not wish to accept him whom they esteemed beneath them in ecclesiastical rank and social and scholarly standing, our Lord quoted to them a proverb: "A prophet is not without honor but in his own country." Had Jesus come from afar, they probably would not have resented his lowly origin, as they esteemed it, and his humble occupation. We learn from this how foolish it is to overlook the precious things we have just because they are near and familiar to us. Is not this one reason why we, in this Christian land, hear and handle the Bible with such cold and stupid indifference? We have always been used to it. It lies on our tables, is read in our churches, and quoted by our ministers. The privileges of the Christian religion and the ordinances of God's house are nothing to us because they are, as it were, of our own country, our own kindred, and our own house. And yet this is a mark of God's goodness to us, that he has put his grace in near and homely relations. Signs and wonders, a stranger from a far country, teaching from the lips of a worldly-wise

man, attract and hold our attention, while we reject the truth that is at our own doors. We look at the vessel and not at the treasure; the circumstances, and not at the fact.

II.—THE POWER OF UNBELIEF.

He could there do no mighty works, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief. It is not for us to solve the riddle of the relation between human faith and unbelief and the power of God. It is sufficient for us to know that it is in the power of human unbelief to hold back and prevent the operation of divine power. The record does not say he would do no mighty work, as though he resented their unbelief, but that he could not thus work. He came full of power and goodwill to do many and mighty works, but they prevented him, and he could only do a little of what he intended. If the mighty healing power of Jesus was limited by the unbelief of his townsmen, so that he could not do as he would for them, how surely is the mighty saving power of the Gospel hindered by the unbelief of sinners now! The Gospel of Christ leaves some benefits behind even to the unbelievers, but it can only work its mighty wonders upon the souls of men when they receive it heartily, as the good ground received the seed that was sown in it. The people of Jerusalem would not let Jesus gather them as a hen gathers her brood under her sheltering wing, and so had to be left to the destroyer. Sinners who will not receive Jesus Christ must be left to the dire consequences of their own sins. God himself can not prevent the damnation of a soul that will not believe and receive Jesus Christ. This is the only case but one in which we are told that Jesus was surprised. He marveled at the unbelief of those who had such opportunities, but despised them. In the other case, he marveled at the faith of a Gentile soldier who was not only ready to receive his help, but was confident of his power under conditions that he himself had not suggested. Many a heathen will rise up and condemn sinners who have lived in Christian lands. What we reject, amid all favorable conditions for receiving, they receive with joy, in spite of many unfavorable conditions.

III.—SENDING FORTH THE TWELVE.

Nazareth rejected the Saviour, but their unbelief did not dam up the flow of his mercy and grace. Indeed, he, turning away from their

ingratitude, continued to teach in the villages round about. Moreover, he immediately planned for the widening of his influence and power. Hitherto his disciples had been attendant upon him as learners; now he will communicate his own power to them and multiply himself many times. In this new departure we get the first suggestion of the method by which Jesus intended to reach the whole world with his Gospel. He not only commands them forth, but gives them power. Even so he sends us forth now, clothed with authority and furnished with power. The power to do God's work is not of ourselves, but of him who sends us. He sends them forth by twos, that they may be helpers of each other's faith and courage and bearers of each other's burdens. There is great wisdom in this—a wisdom that we do not always follow, either in our work for Jesus or in the ordering of our individual lives. It is not good for man to live or work alone. Peter and John went together, Paul and Barnabas were yoke-fellows; and when they parted, because they could not agree, they each chose another companion, and the work went on, Paul and Silas going into one field and Barnabas and Mark into another. Sometimes Christians try to live alone, rejecting fellowship and withholding confidences. It is not good for them. We are to comprehend, with other saints, the love and power of God. He sent them without purse or scrip; not that this was to be the invariable rule, for at another time he commanded them differently. But, at least, we may learn that in the service of Jesus we are not to be cumbered with many things, even for our own comfort. On the same principle, he bade them stay in the house where they first came; too much hospitable entertainment would interfere with their work. They were his representatives, and he told them that in their persons and in their message he would be received or rejected. If any received them not, nor their message, they were to shake off the dust of their feet; not in wrath, but as a testimony against them. Here was haste. The testimony to all the country must be given, and they must accept responsibility. The judgment is just ahead, and if they shall reject the message he sends them, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them. How shall we stand in the judgment who have not had one opportunity only, but have been preached to and taught all the days of our lives, and yet have not received the testimony? Their message was the old one of repentance. They were bidden to command the people to change their minds, and give up their old false notions, fostered by nature and the wrong teachings of an unspiritual Church, and accept the mind of God as unfolded to them in Jesus Christ; and, of course, with a change of mind from wrong thinking to

right thinking, from earthly thoughts to God's thought, would come a corresponding change of life. Thus, the Apostles preached and cast out devils. Devils only go out of men when the truth of God as it is in Jesus Christ is preached and received. Christ, in his Gospel, is the only power that can save men; and this power is present with those who go forth in the name of Christ, clothed with his authority and anointed with his Spirit. As the Father sent him, even so he sends us; therefore he breathes upon us and says: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

LESSON IX.

JESUS THE MESSIAH.—Mark viii, 27–38; ix, 1.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.—Mark viii, 34.

And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Cesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him. And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.—Mark viii, 27–38; ix, 1.

A great crisis in the life and ministry of the Son of God had come; and, also, in the faith and fellowship of the disciples. Popular enthusiasm was waning. But once more would it break out among the superficial multitude only to disappear as quickly. The conspiracy among the chief priests and rulers was ripening. They were now following Jesus, bent on entangling him in his words and provoking him to some overt act that would justify them in laying violent hands on him. He will not strive nor cry in the streets; will not follow controversy more than is meet. Though he might have enraged the people against the Pharisees and the Scribes, he will not do this. He would rather give way before the malice and murderous hate of the rulers than use his undoubted power to confound and

confuse them. He will show no sign from heaven in answer to their challenge. The recognition of his Godhead must not come in that way. It is by spiritual perception of him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, that men must attach themselves to him, not by the force of overwhelming evidence to the senses. He would give his sensual pursuers no sign; but, grieved and troubled, both at their blindness to spiritual truth and the deep-seated wickedness in their hearts which he perceived, "he sighed deeply in his spirit" and "left them, and entering into a ship departed to the other side" (verses 11-13). Though he will show no sign to the malicious curiosity of those who seek to destroy him, yet he will not cease to work miracles of love upon those sufferers whom he finds in his way as he again seeks partial retirement with his disciples (see 22-26). But his mind and heart are now turned to his disciples; they must be taught yet more fully the great truths of the kingdom of God. Their personal faith in him must be developed, strengthened, and confirmed. As yet they understood not the way to the kingdom; they had no clear conception, if any at all, of his sufferings, coming death and triumph by way of the cross. They had no conception that their discipleship was to be involved in suffering, and loss of the world on their part. They must be prepared for the worst and make ready to take their stand in an evil and adulterous generation, and not be scandalized by the shameful death of their Messiah. Therefore he leads them, teaching as he goes, into the wild country in the north-east of Galilee, up among the headwaters of the Jordan, there to introduce them into the living mysteries of his person and the great secret of the kingdom of God. Here he is far from the reach of his priestly enemies, and may commune with his disciples and such of the people as follow him, attracted by something other than a curious or malicious interest.

I.—WHO IS HE ?

Thus far both the religious leaders and the common people have failed to comprehend him. The common people were charmed and delighted with his gracious words and the exercise of his benevolent power. Perhaps they looked in a mild way for some remarkable development which should lead to a new order of things under his leadership, greatly ameliorate their condition, and deliver them both from the Roman yoke and the heartless and even more cruel bondage imposed upon them by the religious oligarchy of the priests. The rulers misunderstood him. They hated him because he so fearlessly and mercilessly exposed their hypocrisies, and in the hearing of the people,

swept away their fine-spun sophistries as though they were but spider webs. They hated him, because, discerning some mysterious power which they knew not of, they feared he would use it to arouse the people, overthrow them, and take away their place and profits—for they were proud, ambitious, and covetous, willing to submit to Rome if only they might retain power and gain the world. Would his disciples know him any better ? They had been his intimate companions for more than two years; they had known him personally as well as by his words and works. It was all-important that they should know exactly who he was, and what was to be the result to him and them of his earthly mission. Of course he knew what they thought, but he would have them articulate their own faith, defining to themselves more clearly than ever before that they, with him, must be separate from the mass of their countrymen, and come into possession of the hoped-for kingdom by another road and in another way than that of the popular conception. Therefore he asks them two searching and differentiating questions.

1.—“**Whom do men say that I am ?**”—He had been more than two years before the people. Sufficient time had elapsed for them to make up their minds as to who he was. He was popularly regarded by the common people everywhere as a prophet; but beyond that were other thoughts and opinions. He seems not to have asked for the opinions of his enemies, but of those who were more or less friendly toward him. There had been a premature disposition shown by the people to make him a king; but that popular enthusiasm had cooled down. His teachings and miracles had promised much, but nothing came of them beyond the immediate blessing and comfort he had imparted to those who had profited by them. He had passed the meridian of his ministry, and now his sun was beginning to set. What did men think ? What were their opinions ? There were many. Some came near the truth, or were in the direction of it, as in the case of those who said “he is Elias,” as if he were a forerunner of Christ; and those who said “he is one of the prophets.” These were good as far as they went, but they did not go far enough, they did not touch the core of the matter. No opinion which men may entertain of Jesus, however honorable and worthy, is equal to the central truth concerning his Godhead. Others held superstitious opinions concerning him, as did Herod, who declared that he was John the Baptist risen from the dead. This was wide of the mark, though not meant to be to his disparagement. There is to-day a mass of goodly opinions concerning Christ which amount to nothing in practical effect upon those who entertain them. Some are favorable, and have suggestions of the truth in them;

some are wide of the mark, though not derogatory to him. These opinions are what "men say"; the conclusions of "flesh and blood," and must always fall short of the truth. It is not what men say of Jesus, but what the Father in heaven has revealed concerning him, both in the record which he has given of his Son, and in the living faith which he imparts to men by the Holy Spirit who takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. (Matt. xvi, 17; I John v, 8-13; John xx, 31; xvi, 15.) Therefore, if we will know the truth regarding Christ, let us turn away from the opinions of men to the testimony of God by the word and Spirit, and to that of the Spirit-taught disciples.

2.—"Whom do ye say that I am?"—This was a momentous question; and, humanly speaking, it precipitated a crisis upon both Jesus and his disciples. Had they any thing more than opinions? Had they advanced in their knowledge of him? In a word, had they faith, as distinct from mere opinion? He was soon to be put to death. Was he to leave behind him in the hearts of his disciples the revelation of God which he came to make? Unless they had faith he could found no church; could communicate no saving knowledge to the world. Happily, these men who had accompanied Jesus from the beginning knew him, though they had never been called upon in so particular a manner to declare it. No doubt this faith in his true and eternal Sonship had been latent in their hearts for a long time; but now he creates the exigency in which it suddenly springs into full consciousness and voices itself definitely. This question comes to every man, who hears the Gospel, sooner or later, and it must be met and answered. Happy the man who can answer as Peter did: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matt. xvi, 16.) We quote the full answer of Peter as given by Matthew, the better to compare the briefer record of it made by Mark. There is no conflict in these two accounts. They were recorded to meet different ends. It is striking that Mark, who must have had this account from Peter himself, records neither the benediction of Christ, in which he declares him to be the rock upon which he will build the Church, nor the commission concerning the keys. Peter, evidently, did not interpret these sayings of Christ to him as do those who thrust peculiar and distinctive honor and prerogative upon him. He answered not for himself alone, but for all the disciples. He answered for every believer who sees in Jesus the Son of God. There are several very noteworthy features in this confession as compiled from the accounts given by Matthew, Luke, and Mark. First, we note the bravery of it. They were ready, in making this confession, to part company with all the rest of the world. They forsook popular speculations, and defi-

nately attached themselves to Jesus, whose sun was setting ; they were ready to abandon all the natural prejudices of the nation, and all the cherished, though false, teachings of their religious instructors. "Let others think as they will ; as for us," they say, "and to us, thou art the Messiah. Let come what will, we believe in thee, and are ready to trust thee." They were ready to prove themselves faithful among all that faithless nation. Perhaps their hearts were not conscious of all this, wrapped up, as it was, in that confession as in a seed. It is an act of courage, courage of the higher nature, courage which only God inspires, that confesses Jesus as Lord and casts in lot and life with him. It is courage in advance of deliberation, and which must be put to the test presently and better instructed, as we see further on in this lesson. Second, we note the clearness of it. It cleaves clear through all the preliminary questions, and surmounts all the arguments and disputations involved in the doctrine of the incarnation of God in human nature. It sets aside every thing else, and announces this one central, all-important and all-comprehensive truth. "Thou art the Christ the Son of God !" There may be differences of opinion on many points concerning Christ, but as to this central truth there must be no doubt, no uncertainty. If he is not more than a prophet, and if he does not stand apart from every other being in the universe, over all, above all, and "God blessed forever," then his life is without meaning, his death without efficacy, and his word without authority. The supreme importance of this confession is seen in what our Lord said in reply to Peter : "Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The importance of this statement is that it teaches us that if we would build on Christ, who is himself the Rock of Ages, we must build with such a faith as this of Peter's.

II.—THE PATHWAY TO THE KINGDOM.

Having received this confession from his disciples, and being assured of their faith in him as the Son of God, he can now teach them the deeper things concerning himself and the kingdom. He first charges them that they are not to attempt to win men to him as the Son of God by mere declaration of that fact. "He charged them that they should tell no man of him." The world was to know Christ, if ever, only after his sufferings and death. It is not enough that he is recognized as the Son of God. It is not Christ alone, but Christ and him crucified who is the world's Saviour. This they must now learn. They did not themselves know this ; nor were they prepared to know

it until they clearly understood who he was. For any one less than the Son of God to be delivered into the hands of his enemies and "be killed," would be the destruction of all hope; and, even in his case, it would be fatal to their faith and to his power unless, indeed, he should "rise again." We see in the later story how this was verified. The disciples whom he overtook on their way to Emaus after his resurrection had suffered an eclipse of faith because of his death. "We trusted that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel." But the chief priest and the rulers delivered him to be crucified. They had in the suddenness of the shock caused by his shameful death forgotten that he had told them that he must suffer and be killed and raised again. Therefore, when he opened their understanding to the fact of his resurrection, he said unto them: "Ought not Christ to have suffered and entered into his glory?" (Luke xxiv, 13-27.) Jesus now begins to teach them that the way to the Kingdom, both for himself and for them, is by the cross, over and through a pathway of suffering, the end of it to him and to them being seen and joyfully embraced in the fact of the resurrection. How blessed is this! Whenever Jesus speaks of his sufferings he always speaks of his resurrection. This is the secret of hope and power, the cure for all heart sinking. Did we but remember his saying, "The third day I will arise again," how much of bitter foreboding would we escape. These things he spoke openly in the hearing of the people who had followed him. They were to hear and consider them as well as those to whom the mystery of his Godhead had been revealed, for they too would know that secret of secrets after his suffering and resurrection were accomplished. This announcement of suffering and death would help turn their thought from false notions of a present and temporal kingdom.

III.—PETER REBUKED.

How sudden the transition from a confession which was inspired by the Spirit of God to an unadvised and carnal remonstrance which was by the inspiration of Satan himself. The warm-hearted and impulsive Peter, upon hearing the sad and dreadful words of Jesus, without stopping to consider them or ask their meaning, seeks to take things in his own hand, protests against the further progress of events, and in the declaration, "This shall not be unto thee," perhaps meant that he and the other disciples would fight for and defend him against such a calamity. Subsequently, when Judas came with his murdering guard to arrest Jesus, Peter attempted to do this. Looking about him, as if to inquire whether this thought was in the minds of the

other disciples, also, our Lord rebukes Peter, and in no soft terms. "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." A moment before Peter had spoken with the savor of God; now he speaks with the savor of men, of men moved by Satan himself. What did this mean? Was Jesus angry? Hardly that. No, not that at all. He saw whence this temptation came. He recognized the spirit of his great adversary, who, on the mountain, had offered him an easy and flowery way to power. It shows how keenly sensitive Jesus was to his coming doom. His tender nature shrank from it, though he knew it must be and had resolutely set his face to meet it. Yet he was touched by our feeling of infirmity and was tempted in all points like as we. The kindly impulse of Peter was the vehicle in which Satan came to tempt Christ from the pathway of duty. What lessons are here! If Jesus could be thus tempted, how much do we need to be on our guard against the subtle influences of temptation, especially when they come through the kindly and loving words of those who wish us not harm but good. We may also learn how to resist the devil: by promptly rebuking him, stopping not a moment to parley with him. We must even roughly deal with our best beloved and tenderest, loving friends if they come to us with well-meant but Satan-inspired dissuasions from duty that lies along the way of self-sacrifice and suffering.

IV.—THE LAW OF DISCIPLESHIP.

Taking advantage of this misguided advice of Peter, our Lord calls the people about him and begins to instruct them also that their discipleship must be wrought out in spirit at least in the same way that his kingship was to be won. He reached the throne by self-denial and suffering. If any man will come after him, he also must travel along this road. At least he must face and accept it, and be ready for any thing which God puts in his way or which he may meet in the way to God. To deny self is to set aside our own will and choose only the will of God. We are no longer self-centered, but God-centered, and therefore self—self-interest and self-indulgence—is not to be considered. We are to take up our cross. Not his cross. That we can not do. He only could suffer that great passion which expiated sin and brought us back to God; but there is a cross for every one. We may meet it at any time and in any way. When we do meet it we must take it up and bear it until it has fulfilled its mission in us. We must follow him, in the pathway that leads from the ways, thoughts, and principles of this wor'd to God. If we regard this earthly life, that is,

life in the earth, more than heavenly life, or life with God, then in saving the one we shall lose the other. But if, on the other hand, we "count not our life dear" if it comes between us and Jesus, then, though we lose our life in this world, we shall find it in the other. Our Lord closes this searching discourse with a far-reaching question and a startling statement. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Here is an impossible gain. No man can gain the whole world. But here is a possible loss. In seeking to gain the world we may lose our souls. And then what? Can the part of the world we have gained be given in exchange for our souls? That is, can it be a ransom price to redeem that which we have lost while in pursuit of the world? What folly it all is that leads us to compromise with and seek to save the passing world at the expense of losing the enduring one! Gaining this world is not worth spending our life for. Man does not live either by bread, possession, or pleasure. Something more is necessary for life, even here. Finally, our Lord teaches us, if in this adulterous and sinful generation we are ashamed to confess him and to proclaim our faith in his words and work, he will be ashamed to confess us when he comes in his glory. The world denies the Christ of Peter's confession, though it is ready to confess the Jesus of men's opinions; but we must not be ashamed of the Christ who won heaven for us through the cross, and opens a way to it for us by faith and fellowship with him.

LESSON X.

THE CHILD-LIKE SPIRIT.—Mark ix, 33-42.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein.—Mark x, 14.

And he came to Capernaum : and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way ? But they held their peace : for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them : and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me ; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me. And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us ; and we forbade him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not : for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.—Mark ix, 33-42.

Jesus was now on his way back from the north country. He was making his last tour of Galilee. He was about to enter Capernaum for the last time. His spirit was heavy on account of his coming passion, concerning which Moses and Elias had talked with him on the Mount of Transfiguration. He was unusually quiet and thoughtful. He had not, of late, talked much to his disciples. They were left to talk with each other. Perhaps he wished to give them opportunity to think deeply on the things which they had seen and heard of him. The whole context is crowded with rapid sketches of things which were happening without and of thoughts brooding within. Jesus was purposely avoiding the crowd which usually attended him. The reason probably was that his public ministry was practically over, and he was anxious not to precipitate matters which were hastening on rapidly enough. He wanted opportunity to commune with his disciples, prepare them for what was coming, and lead them to know their own hearts and learn more deeply and truly the lessons of the kingdom, of which they understood so little. For a second time he spoke to them of his coming

passion. They either did not understand him or did not wish to. If he meant literally that he was to be put to death, then all their dreams were gone, for they had only dreamed of an earthly kingdom and of personal greatness in it. They were afraid to ask him what he meant—afraid lest their worst fears should be confirmed. They wished to remain in the dark concerning this, that they might yet indulge their carnal hopes.

Jesus with his disciples had now reached Capernaum and went immediately into the privacy of "the house." Probably Simon's house, which was his home in that city. He gathers his disciples, the twelve, about him, and begins an earnest and searching discourse touching things which deeply concerned him, them, and the future development of his kingdom among men. The lesson with which we have to do unfolds the principles of greatness, service, and offenses.

I—CONCERNING GREATNESS.

The disciples had been discussing among themselves, and even disputing, concerning their places of power and influence in the coming kingdom, and were trying to settle who should be greatest. This question of greatness was probably confined to Peter, James, and John. They were the recognized leaders among the twelve; the rest were but partisans as between these three. Should Peter be called to the place of Prime Minister in the Kingdom, or would it fall to the two brothers, either separately or conjointly? Alas, that such ambitious and carnal thoughts should occupy the minds of the disciples while the Lord's heart was heavy with the burden he was soon to bear for them and the world, when on the cross he must offer up his life in sacrifice! But such is the blindness, stupidity, and selfishness of that human nature Christ came to redeem and regenerate. We should be careful not to blame them overmuch, for, though we know more clearly than they did the truth of the kingdom, are we not often as guilty, even more guilty, of self-seeking, of compassing worldly ends apart from the kingdom, while as yet the travail of Christ's soul is at the greatest for the men and women whom he would draw away from death to life, from sin to salvation?

Jesus asks them about what they were disputing on the way. Not that he did not know, but because he wished to make their dispute the occasion to speak to them clearly and earnestly of their own wrong spirit, and enlighten them fully concerning the great principles of his dealing with men and the character of the saved as he would have it developed. To his question they made no answer. Their lips were

sealed with shame and their spirits covered with confusion. In the presence of this lowly Master their selfish ambition seemed vile to themselves, and though they did not understand all the sin of it, they were intuitively conscious of the smallness, the meanness of it. It would be well for us to come often into his presence and think over our thoughts while opening our hearts to him. Many things which we think and plan away from his presence will not bear even to be confessed except in spirit in his presence. In silence, when he calls us to account for our thought, we must sit and suffer him to teach us.

It was a beautiful and tender thing for Jesus to do. "Come; sit down, my brethren, and let me tell you some things which you much need to know; especially concerning this selfish ambition of yours."

1.—Greatness or ambition for greatness is not reproved.—

He does not say that we are to despise or ignore the abilities which God has given us, or crush out of our hearts a natural desire to place ourselves in positions wherein we may use our gifts to the best advantage. It is not wrong to desire to be even first in his kingdom. It is only for us to be sure that we are desiring to be great on true principles. The whole Scripture is an inspiration to men to make the best of their talents, to seek the prize of the high calling of God, to receive the rewards which God offers for best and highest service. That false humility or negligent spirit which prompted the man in the parable to hide his one talent in a napkin, is sufficiently rebuked by our Lord to warn us that he would not have us despise success or neglect any means to win it, and with it his approval and promotion to higher place and larger trust. It is as though he had said: "If any one of you has a desire to be first in my kingdom, it is well. I approve of such ambition; but I wish to warn you that there is a true and a false greatness; a true and a false method of reaching after greatness; that there is danger that your desire may be perverted, and lead to your downfall and confusion rather than to your elevation and joy."

2.—True greatness and how it is won.—Greatness does not consist in the place we occupy in the eyes of men. It is not to seem to be great, or to be supposed great, but to *be* great. In the kingdom of God greatness is in being and doing, not in having and being seen of men. Christ himself was the highest illustration of what he said to his disciples. He left place, glory, and honor for lowliness, humiliation, shame, dishonor, and death, that he might serve others, even though in so doing he might seem to be the least among men. He ascended his throne by the steps of humiliation and suffering. He emptied himself of his glory that he might take the shame and dis-

honor of others and do the will of his Father. The apostle has beautifully interpreted this law of greatness by self-abnegation in Phil. ii, 5-9. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ." See how Christ reached the first place in the universe. (a) He did not seek his own. (b) He humbled himself. (c) He willingly lost his reputation; was willing to seem to be less than he was. (d) He took a servant's place and did a servant's work, suffering himself to be seen only as a servant. (e) He who had the right and power to command obedience became obedient, even unto death, and that the most shameful; not that he might be great, but that he might help and save others. "Wherefore God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every name." This is the lesson Jesus taught his disciples. How utterly it reverses all human conceptions of greatness. He who will be first in Christ's kingdom must be last and least of all; and that not for the sake of being first. He must not center himself upon himself, or coil his actions about himself. Greatness as an end must be given up entirely and self-abnegating service of others substituted for it. It is as fatal for a man to descend for the sake of ascending as to struggle directly for the first place. "The great sociological law of the kingdom of heaven is not this: Use thyself for thyself; still less is it this: Use others for thyself; but it is this: Use thyself for others." Is it not more blessed to give than to receive? In unselfishly seeking to make others happy are we not sure to make ourselves happy? But this was never known as a law until Christ taught it.

3.—The parable of greatness.—To illustrate what he meant, our Lord took a little child who was standing near, perhaps who had unconsciously crowded up to his knees as he talked (as the wont of children is where there is one in whom they instinctively trust) and folding it in his arms, drawing it down upon his heart, he said: "This is true greatness." First he had pointed out to them the child and set it in the midst. That little child was not seeking any thing for itself. No corroding ambition was in its heart. It was not thinking of itself at all, but was just thinking of Jesus and desiring to be near and with him. Christ was the center of its thoughts. Whosoever therefore shall forget himself in his desire to be with me; that is, to have fellowship with me in my mission toward men, the same shall be great, and shall be caught in my arms and pressed to my heart. Not to be by me put in a place of power that men shall envy, but to be with me, in my very heart and arms. This is both greatness and honor. To be with him and like him, this is the true desire of a truly Christ-like man. How the world's men who have sought and attained greatness have missed the mark! Think on Alexander, and Wolsey, and Napoleon!

We are not to reach the high places of heaven in their way; and could we do so, the attainment would be our misery.

Turning, now, the thought from the place of primacy to the pathway of greatness, he, still using the little child as a parable of service, begins another sentence in his exalted discourse. Naturally you will now be saying: "What great thing then may we do to win a first place through service." The human heart is desperately deceitful. We will abnegate ourselves (so we think), give up the first place by doing some great service that will draw forth praise and honor. "No," says Christ; "do not aspire to great things, thinking that only great sacrifices and great deeds will lead to glory. There may be as much pride and ambition in the pathway of service as in any other. There are many little, lowly, insignificant ones in the world whom you would most probably pass by; not only little children, but those of a child-like spirit." The least one in all this world is not so far beneath us in place and importance as we are beneath Christ. To do the smallest service is not for us such a stoop as it was for him to come to our help and salvation. But, again, greatness is not in doing little things or serving little children alone—it is in the motive with which such service and all service is done. "In my name." For my sake. It is not the service, but the motive which glorifies the act. Many a lowly act of service is done in this world, beautiful in itself, but without any motive that attaches it to Christ. I do not say that such service is overlooked by God and Christ, but only that it can not be a really high service that does not have in it the highest motive. Whosoever extends fellowship and gives help to any person or to any cause, does it to Christ, and whosoever does it to Christ does it to God. And in receiving such persons or doing such things the servant receives God. God identifies himself with the object of our love or kindness when we are moved by the love of him in our action. (See Matt. xxv, 40.)

II.—CONCERNING SERVICE.

This discourse seems to have wrought conviction instantly and deeply in the heart of John, for he thereupon refers an action of theirs to Jesus for judgment. It seems that on the way they had seen or heard of one, some one not attached to their company, who had cast out a devil in the name of Christ. They had forbidden him to do so any more. It is singular that they who had failed a little while ago to accomplish a similar good work (vs. 28) should be so forward in forbidding another, on the ground that the prerogative was peculiarly theirs. This is often the case; we who assume to be the favored servants, fail-

ing in the work of Christ, are apt to be jealous of others not in the charmed circle of supposed privilege, authority, and power; especially if they succeed where we fail. Now if any thing done in the name of Jesus is accepted, does this rule apply to those who are not "following with us," not in our sect or company? "Perhaps," says John, "we have done wrong." He was getting into the right way now. Jesus tells them plainly: "He that is not against us is on our part. He can not speak lightly of my name who uses it for the accomplishment of a good work." Here is a great lesson. It has ever been the tendency of men to draw a line about themselves and assume that they, and they only, are in the true way; that they, and they only, have right and power. Jesus says that it is not possible so to monopolize the privileges and powers of grace. Even so Moses rebuked the gallant and loyal-hearted Joshua when he said: "Would God, all the Lord's people would prophesy." And Paul declared the same thing when he said he would rejoice whenever and wherever and by whomsoever Christ was preached. (Num. xi, 29; Phil. i, 18.) This man, whoever he was, was doing a good work in the name of Christ, even a work which they had failed to do. Must he be forbidden because he was not in just the same place with them as to form or the extent of his knowledge? Shall we forbid those outside the organized Church, the ignorant but zealous workers for Christ to save souls, because they do not belong to our order or are not working in our way? Shall we forbid any good work done in the name of Christ, even if it comes short of being the highest work, because the worker is not as well instructed as we are, or has not attained to the highest spiritual conception of Christ? The greatest movements of modern times have been championed in the name of Christ by some who have not known him as an atoning and redeeming Saviour, who have not even known him as the Son of God. Should we forbid a man to assist in abolishing slavery, saving drunkards, relieving the poor, and pushing on great reform movements, because he does not accept Christ as Saviour and Lord, if, nevertheless, he is inspired to do his good work by the name and life of Jesus? Certainly not. But it does not follow that every good work done in the name of Christ necessarily secures for the doer of it the salvation of his soul. A good work may be accepted even when the doer of it is not. But let such alone. They may be on the way to a higher knowledge of and to a closer fellowship with Christ. We must not quench the smoking flax or break the bruised reed. It is to be feared that many souls on the way to Christ and fellowship with his true disciples have been turned back by acting on a narrow rule that forbids all work or service or using of the name of Christ

except as we do. Even if in the name of Christ and for his sake a cup of water is given to a disciple, the giver of it will not fail of reward. There are birthright blessings and secondary blessings. It is better that a man follow the example of Christ where he can, even though he does not accept him as the Son of God, than that he should be against him altogether. In the latter case he travels backward into death, in the former he may finally come to the kingdom of heaven. Let us encourage every one who thinks well of Christ to go on in his name, rather than forbid him. It would be better to have a man attend church, even though he does not accept Christ, than to forbid him to come longer to the house of God unless he will become a disciple.

III.—CONCERNING OFFENSES.

Having instructed them to be charitable and even sympathetic toward one who seems to be kindly disposed toward them and him, he now speaks of some who are in an opposite way. Some there are who do not go far enough in the use of the name of Christ; but there are others who are malicious in their hatred of him; who not only will not give a cup of water to a disciple, help and encourage a little one, or lend a hand in the work of casting out devils, but who are intent on hindering, tripping up and causing those who are in the way to stumble. Charitable and sympathetic with those who are kindly disposed toward his name, though not entirely his disciples, our Lord speaks with solemn and awful severity of those who seek to destroy the faith of his disciples, especially of the feeble ones. There are such men, who are never content unless they are undermining the faith of Christians, tempting them out of the way, and luring them back to the world. Concerning them Christ draws a picture. It would be an awful thing to see a man with a great millstone tied about his neck and hurled into the sea; but that would not be so bad a fate as that which will befall the man who causes a believer to stumble, to lose his footing in the pathway of faith, or to be caught in the trap of Satan. Woe unto them by whom such offenses come! There is hope for a man who is not wholly in the kingdom, but the man who persists in seeking to destroy souls is a man doomed to dreadful destruction. It is an awful thought that it is possible for men to do this thing—to be involved in this terrible offense—who perhaps are not conscious of doing it. A careless, worldly, and selfish professor of religion may be the occasion of causing some weak brother to stumble and perish in the way. It was the thought of this possibility which led the great-hearted Apostle Paul to adopt that rule of expe-

diency which guided him in his life and liberties when there were weak brethren about. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more (that is, to condemn those who are not adopting our opinions or who do not walk by the rule of our conscience, or accept our interpretations of the law of Christ); but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." "Therefore if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably (or in love toward him). Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." We can better afford to give up some lawful but indifferent privilege than, by pressing our own rights, to endanger a weak brother's conscience. (Rom. xiv, 13-18.)

LESSON XI.

CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE YOUNG.—Mark x, 13-22.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.—Mark x, 14.

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them. And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.—Mark x, 18-22.

The transition from converse and discussion concerning marriage and divorce to that of little children is suggestive. Whatever may be the infelicities and bitternesses engendered between those who marry and are given in marriage; and however hastily or at leisure one may be led to say: "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry," surely the sight of little children ought to soften such a judgment and sanctify the marriage relation, so that all patience, forbearance and long-suffering may be found between those who might otherwise, through hardness of heart, be led into the misery of divorce. It was after a discourse concerning divorce that, as they were journeying on the highway, some parents, moved by their instinctive conviction that the tender and loving heart of Jesus would be open to the appeal of little children, led and encouraged their children to go to him for his blessing. This lesson ought to be carefully compared with Matt. xix, 13-15; and Luke xviii, 15-17. Luke calls these little ones "babes," but Matthew and Mark speak of them as little children.

The probability is that they were not infants in arms, but little children, able to run along with their parents in the thronging crowd to see and hear Jesus; such as were in the temple at the time of his triumphal entry, who followed him there and cried out, much to the scandal of the priests and the scribes: "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. xxi, 15); or such as were in the crowd fed by Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. xiv, 21). Young children, little children, from three or four to eight and twelve years of age, but perhaps younger than twelve.

I.—JESUS AND THE CHILDREN.

There is not among the many touching and soul-inspiring incidents in the life of Jesus a more suggestive and beautiful one than this. Jesus has not only been the liberator of woman from the miserable bondage in which the heathen nations have ever kept her, but he has been the Saviour of children. And, on the other hand, he has been made rich by their praises, and from their ranks has been recruited the great mass of his disciples. To them more than to the "wise and prudent" has the revelation of God and his love been clearly made. (Matt. xi, 25.)

1.—The parents bring their children.—We conclude that these parents, to whom the pronoun "they" must refer, were themselves believers in him and of that large number of disciples who had accepted him as a heaven-sent teacher, though not clearly discerning him in all the fullness of his Messiahship. Nothing is more natural to the heart of the Christian parent than to desire for his children the blessing of Jesus Christ. They desired that he should "touch them," that is, lay his hands on them and bless them. We do not know that they had been taught to do this. It was, most likely, a spontaneous instinct of their own renewed hearts, sanctified and enlightened by the love of Christ. There is nothing sadder in this world than to see little children growing up without having been brought to Jesus. There is nothing more beautiful than to see the little ones, early taught concerning Jesus, coming to him; first being brought by parental love and prayer, and then themselves pressing into the kingdom through their childish attachment to Jesus, whom they seem so quick to know and so ready to receive. What parent's heart, especially if that parent knows the love of Christ, does not long to have his children blessed by Christ, folded in his arms and sanctified by his benediction. Alas for those parents who, as the "wise and prudent" unbelievers, do not encourage their children to seek the face and favor of Christ. Too

many Christian parents discourage their children from pressing into real and practical discipleship upon the ground that they are too young. But we are taught here to obey the spiritual and heaven-born instinct which both leads parents and children to seek the blessing of Jesus upon their young heads. We may even now bring our children to him ; and we can not begin with them too young. We may begin, as it was with John the Baptist and Jeremiah, who were sanctified before they were born. (Jer. i, 5 ; Luke i, 15.) And then, with Hannah, at a very early age, as soon as they are weaned, we may carry them to him ; and still later we may bring them, with their own consent and understanding, to him in a still closer relation. It is true that now he can not lay his hands on them, but from heaven his blessing can reach them. Let us not in any case miss this blessing for our children through our neglect of seeking it for them, or through any discouragement or dissuasion of them when they would go to him.

2.—The disciples rebuked those who brought the children.—How little did they understand ! They thought that children would be a bother to the Master ; that he could not stop in the midst of more important matters to be troubled with these over-zealous parents and the prattle of their children. No doubt they thought the children altogether too young to understand any of the things which Jesus had to say. Their thought was that, until they had grown old enough to think out the things of the kingdom, they must not come. Poor conceited men ! How little they themselves understood—how slow of heart they were to understand ! If they only knew it, they were attached to Christ more by the child spirit in them than by any well thought out knowledge of him, any intellectual perception of who he was or how he saved them. This is the common mistake of parents and older Christians with respect to children. “They can not understand. They are too young. Let them wait till they get older.” These are the common objections urged even by parents who are anxious that their children shall be saved. They are mistaken on more than one point. In the first place, we are taught that the things which the “wise and prudent” can not see are “revealed to babes” ; “that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings (even) God has perfected his praise.” Moreover, it is the commonest experience that when the Gospel is preached, children, and often very young children, press forward to embrace Christ, while older people are groping in the blindness of unbelief. We do not properly estimate the capacity of little children to “understand” spiritual things. A few months ago a little child of five years came forward with a large number of older young people upon an invitation given to all who believed on

and received Christ as their Saviour. When I came to this little one, I hesitated to take her name and enroll it among the young converts. I had a little covenant which I used to give to converts to read and sign. I said to this little one (not wishing to offend), "Take this home to your mamma and ask her to explain it to you." Her prompt reply was: "Oh, I quite understand it. I have heard you explain it several times." Further conversation developed a wonderful spiritual understanding. But more than this, it is a mistake to suppose that the blessing of Christ can only enter a sinful heart on the line of clear intellectual understanding. Shall sin reign and abound where grace can not? Are not children influenced for good and evil every day by those who have the most to do with them without their understanding how they are influenced? If parents understood this better, they would not so readily abandon their young children to the too constant influence of mere hired nurses who have no fear of God or love for children in their hearts. Even more than this; we ought not to discourage young children from entering into the outward fellowship of the Church because they are young. Many a child has been set back, discouraged and taught to disbelieve in Christ, in whom in their young childhood they did believe, by the interference and rebuke of unbelieving disciples and worldly, cautious parents.

3.—Jesus rebukes the rebukers.—He was much displeased. He is so now. He is displeased that we do not sufficiently care for our children, our young children, that is, in respect to their being brought to him. He is much displeased that in teaching them we teach them almost every thing but that they may and ought to come to him as their Saviour now; displeased that children are taught Moses and the law much more than they are Jesus and the Gospel. We tell our children "that if they will be good they will be happy;" in which case we throw them back on their own insufficient strength, and give them no glimpse of that grace which they must have as really when little children as when they are grown to mature years. If we did not so persistently neglect and hinder the little children, we should not have to mourn so much over the larger ones. If we did but take more care with them, we should not have to bear so much sorrow on account of them. Jesus not only rebuked his disciples with his anger, but he sharply told them to "suffer," that is, permit the children to come to him. They were probably spreading out their hands to prevent these little ones from coming. Jesus says to them, in effect: "Take your hands off and allow them to come. Get out of their way. Whosoever will, let him come;" no less a little child than a gray-haired sinner.

4.—Jesus gives instructions based on the characteristics of little children.—“For of such is the kingdom of God.” These children who come to me are of the kingdom of God. He does not here say that all children, as such, are of the kingdom of God; but that of such as come to me as these come, is the kingdom of God. He does not here say that all those are of the kingdom of God who have the spirit of little children; but that only such are of the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, in another place he does teach that unless we are converted and become as little children, we can not enter into the kingdom of God. Little children (especially in their coming to Jesus) are humble; they have no consciousness of strength and knowledge; they do not question and debate; they submit themselves to the superior knowledge of others. Little children are not suspicious and distrustful as we are, who have learned to be so by contact with the world and by a knowledge of our own hearts. Little children are obedient and ready to yield to those who are older, wiser, and more experienced than themselves. All these characteristics are worth our consideration. These little ones had them all; he saw it and welcomed them. Let us not only recognize these qualities in little children, but imitate them ourselves.

5.—Jesus blessed the children.—What a beautiful sight was this! “And he took them up in his arms and put his hands upon them and blessed them.” Who would not covet that for his children? To have them enfolded in those strong and loving arms; to have them pressed upon that divinely throbbing breast; to have the benediction of that all-healing hand? Who would not be there himself? Well, though we can not see our children literally there, nor be there ourselves in form and touch, yet may we be there, all the same, in reality. We have, in a previous lesson, learned that it was not the touch of the hand that brought healing to the poor woman who came behind Jesus in the press, but the touch of faith. So here we may surely learn that it is not the physical touch of Christ’s hand that bestows the blessing. It was the love, the grace, and the divine power which lay back of those arms, that throbbed in that bosom, that directed that loving hand. That is all there for us now. By faith we may all draw nigh to him and be enfolded, rested, and blessed by him as really as these little ones were. We are not told that he baptized them, but that he blessed them. We do not undervalue baptism for little children, especially little children who come to him as these came, being encouraged by their parents and moved by their own little hearts; but after all, it is not the baptism, but the blessing we covet for ourselves and our children. However sincerely parents may have

brought their babes to Christ in baptism, let them not rest in that, but teach them diligently till they come themselves and get the blessing. And let no child, because he has been baptized, fancy that therefore he has received the blessing of Christ's loving hand laid in benediction upon him. That comes when children come to him. He is able now to reach us with his blessing from heaven; to keep us safely in his arms, and to give us a home upon his heart and in it.

II.—JESUS AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER.

This incident ought to be studied in connection with Matt. xix, 16-26; and Luke xviii, 18-27. I refer also to the studies in Matthew in last year's volume in the same place. After his conversation and the incident with the children, Jesus and his disciples continued their journey and went forth in the way. As he journeyed with his disciples, he was suddenly interrupted by one running, pressing through the crowd, and falling down in the dust at his feet, kneeling to him, that is, reverencing him.

1.—**The young man and his question.**—We know from another account, that this young man belonged to the higher class of society, and was a ruler among the people. His coming to Jesus as he did was an indication of the genuineness of his desire to know and do the right. All the more marked was his humility, because his own class in society were thoroughly opposed to Jesus, and were, even then, if not in the conspiracy, yet consenting to it, which led to his death. "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" This question, coupled with his earnest manner, showed that he was thoroughly impressed with the conviction of another life, and deeply in earnest to obtain it. Moreover, it revealed the fact that he was dissatisfied with his attainments, whatever they were, and anxious so to supplement them that he might be sure of eternal life. It was not only that he desired to do some work which would fill up the measure of his doing, but he was conscious of subjective deficiency, as indicated by the question further along: "What lack I yet?" All men who are awakened to a knowledge of deficiency see that deficiency both in works and character. If we are to inherit eternal life, we must both do more and be better in ourselves. This is the conviction of conscience, and it is a true one. But until we are instructed in righteousness, we shall not get into the right way to realize the desirable blessings.

2.—**Jesus' answer.**—The young man had addressed him as "Good Master." Jesus first takes him up on this. "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, God." The young man was

thinking not of the supreme good, that is, God, but of human goodness. He paid this exalted tribute to Jesus, that he saw in him one whom he believed had fully realized, both in character and works, the full measure of merit which he so much desired. Jesus would call his attention higher than the standard which he imagined he saw in him, who was only to him a good man. "Look to God for your standard, not to man, however good," he said. Then he directed him to the law. It is noticeable that he only mentioned the commandments of the second table, those relating to duties toward men. For it was only in respect to man that the young ruler was thinking of righteousness. God was not in all his thoughts. This is the common mistake of all moralists. If they can discharge duty toward man, they are in no concern about God. To the directions given by Jesus the young man boldly replies that he has kept all these commandments from his youth up. Jesus perceives his shallowness and pities him. His love went out to him, not because he was so good, but because he saw him so far from the kingdom, so misinformed and conceited. He would if possible save him. So his love goes out to all, and in proportion as they need it greatly, so is the love great and full of pity.

3.—*The young man weighed in his own balances.*—He had brought with him the scales in which Christ weighed him. Jesus proceeds to show him from his own point of view how far short he was. "One thing thou lackest." Jesus did not say that he lacked but one thing, but that at least one thing was lacking even from his point of view. If he had negatively fulfilled all the law of God concerning his duty to man, he had not done so positively. Therefore the testing and searching commandment, "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come follow me." It does not follow that Jesus meant more than that he should regard himself in the light of a steward of God's bounty in respect to the poor. It is as if he had said to the young man: "To keep that commandment in the spirit of it, you must do no less than give your life to the meting out of God's bounty to man as you have opportunity. This from your point of view; but from my point of view," our Saviour continued: "Come follow me." Jesus knew well that the young man could not and would not keep Moses' law, but hoped that, under the consciousness of failure, he would catch at his suggestion, put himself in his hands, and by following him come into life eternal. Jesus always puts the cross over against the law. Paul has given a perfect exposition of this matter in the tenth chapter of Romans, which it will profit all to study in this connection.

4.—The young man's departure.—When he heard the command of Jesus he was sadly disappointed, nay, dejected and gloomy. He was offended and hurt. He had come with high hopes that with or by one great stroke of doing he might settle the whole matter, but he had not dreamed of self-abnegation and cross-bearing and stewardship. He wanted to settle the troublesome question of eternal life in some way in harmony with his circumstances and his own conceits. This is too often the case with inquirers. They come to Christ with their own ideas and wish them to be indorsed, and so permitted to go their way rather than God's way. How many who make a fair show of desire, at last go away grieved by the truth they thought they wanted to know and do, and are never heard of more.

LESSON XII.

BLIND BARTIMEUS.—Mark x, 46-52.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.—Mark x, 48.

And they came to Jericho : and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimeus, the son of Timeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace : but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise ; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.—Mark x, 46-52.

This lesson should be studied in connection with the corresponding accounts to be found in Matt. xx, 29-34; Luke xviii, 35-43.

There is some discrepancy in the accounts given by the three evangelists. Matthew mentions two beggars who were blind, while Mark and Luke mention but this one. That may be easily accounted for by the fact that Bartimeus most probably was the more energetic and persistent man, who acted as spokesman for himself as well as for his companion in distress. In the same way Matthew mentions two demoniacs at Gadara, while Mark confines his account to one. Another difficulty is presented in the fact that while Matthew and Mark say this miracle of healing occurred as Jesus came out of Jericho, Luke says it took place as he was entering the city. It is most probable, or at least not improbable, that this vehement beggar first began his petitions, or crying, as Jesus entered the city, and then, passing through the city, he, as it were, waylaid him as he left it. This would be consistent with his energetic character. The discrepancy is not of serious moment except to those who take the narrowest views of the nature of the inspiration of the writers who make record of the fact. It is not material whether the blind man was healed as Jesus went in or as he went out of the city; the important fact is that he was healed.

Sometimes we find Christians laying more stress upon the day, the hour, the place and circumstances attending their conversion than upon the conversion itself.

Jericho was at this time a very important city. It lay between the Jordan and Jerusalem, not far from the head of the Dead Sea. It was a city of great importance at the time of our Saviour's ministry on earth; it was one of the royal cities of Herod, in which this human monster at last died. Mark's account of the healing of the blind beggar is very graphic and particularly illustrates the efficacy of persistent prayer, and, upon the whole, gives us a fine illustration of what an earnest inquirer is, and also shows us how much more tender and considerate of sinners Jesus was and is than his disciples are.

L—THE PRAYER OF BARTIMEUS.

Blindness was very common in the East. In every city, by every roadside, at the gates of the temple, almost everywhere poor sightless creatures were to be found. They usually depended upon the alms of the people, and sometimes, as beggars are now, were very importunate. This man seems to have been of unusual character, even of importance. This we gather from the account of his successful importunity with Jesus, and also from the fact that his name is preserved to us in the record, a fact not usual in these Gospel narratives. As an illustration of how an earnest seeker finds a prompt answer to his prayers, Bartimeus is conspicuous among the many cases of healing in the New Testament.

1.—An earnest prayer.—The account is very graphic. If it is true that Bartimeus endeavored to get his case before the Lord at the time of his entrance into the city and failed, it makes for the earnestness of the man that, knowing beforehand of the intended route of the Lord on leaving the city, he had promptly gone there and taken up his position where he might more successfully make his crying petition. As soon as the Lord came out of the city with his disciples and the crowd that attended them, Bartimeus having learned, perhaps on inquiry, that the multitude passing was that one in the midst of which Jesus was, began to cry out and say: "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." He felt his blindness keenly. It was a deep distress to him, and the one thing needful for him in all the world was that he might have his sight. He was determined, therefore, not to lose this opportunity of getting his case before the Great Healer. He might never, most probably never would, have another opportunity. Jesus "was passing by." How many there are who, while they acknowledge

their need in a general way, do not feel the bitterness of it, and so make no earnest effort to secure their salvation; who acknowledge that Jesus is a Saviour, yet say to themselves and others, "He will pass my way again. I want to be saved, but I am in no hurry about it; there is plenty of time; this is not the last opportunity I shall have; I have had many before; and another one will come as this one has." This is the language of careless indifference, of the sinner who does not know the bitterness of sin, or believe the testimony of God concerning its terrible guilt and the swift judgment that is coming upon it. Bartimeus was not of this class. He was keenly alive to his need and to his opportunity, and therefore was determined to "seek the Lord while he might be found, and to call upon him while he was near." When sinners are thus in earnest, their cry enters into the ears of God and brings back the answer their souls long for.

2.—An eager prayer.—He did not wait for everybody else to get through with their talking; he did not wait to find out whether the Great Healer was engaged with others. Just as soon as he heard that he was in the throng passing by he began at once to cry out. "Now" was his time, and now he made his cry. A very wicked man was once brought, during the night, after attending a religious meeting, under deep conviction for sin. He arose and in the morning started to find the minister who had preached. He met him on the street and told him his distress, and said, "I want you to pray for me." "I will," said the minister, and then started to go on his way. "But," said the man, detaining him, "I want you to pray for me now." "What, right here in the street?" "Yes," said the man, "I can't afford to wait." So the minister lifted his hat from his head and there, standing with the man on a crowded street, prayed for him, to the surprise of the passers-by, but to the great comfort of the sinner, who then and there found Christ. Dr. Chalmers once had an inquirer go home and read a certain chapter in the Bible and then pray to God for pardon. The man went away, but in a few moments returned and, to the Doctor's surprise, said to him: "But, Doctor, suppose I should die or get killed on my way home, what would be my condition in eternity?" The good Doctor, aroused by this eagerness and the importance of the truth suggested, said to the man: "Pray now, right here in the hall-way, and give yourself to God without a moment's delay." So he did, and was saved that moment. This is the truth here. Bartimeus was eager for his healing, and wanted it done then, at that moment, before the opportunity passed away.

3.—A persistent prayer.—There were great discouragements in his way. The throng was great, and he was on the outer edge of it.

It was passing more rapidly than he could follow. He was blind and could not see at just what position in the throng Jesus was; so he began to cry at once and kept it up, we can imagine, in a loud, persistent voice, which he meant should reach the ears of Christ wherever he was. So loud and vehement was his cry, that the people, that is, many of them, rebuked him and bade him hold his peace. He was but a beggar, and Jesus was probably discoursing on some important theme; at least it seemed to them that it was not seemly to be making that outcry. Alas, how often even the disciples of the Lord hinder coming sinners. Many a soul has been rebuked by the followers of Jesus for being too eager, or too persistent, or too unconventional in his mode of approach. But Bartimeus was in dead earnest, and instead of being put down and silenced, he cried out the more, a great deal: "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." What to him were the proprieties or the cold frowns and colder rebukes of those who did not know how great his distress was? He wanted his sight, and so he persisted against all discouragements, and pressed his suit. Unless we want salvation more than any thing else, and are ready to seek for it in spite of all discouragements and at all costs, we shall not find it. Happily, it is not the case that many have such discouragements in their suit as did this blind beggar, but that makes the indifference and half-hearted way in which many seek the Lord now more noticeable and culpable.

4.—It was an intelligent prayer.—The address of the man to Jesus showed that he regarded him as being more than a great teacher, or even more than a great healer; more than a prophet. "Thou Son of David" was a distinct recognition of his Messianic character, and at the same time an appeal to him in the name and on the authority of the word of God. All the great prophets who prophesied of the coming of the Messiah, declared that when he came the blind should receive their sight. This was one of the signs which should mark his coming. (Is. xxix, 18; xlii, 7, 16, 18, 19; xliii, 8; lvi, 10; lxix, 10, etc.) He had pondered these things, and now that he was satisfied that this Jesus was the Messiah, he was the more bold to call upon him for his sight. This was, then, an intelligent prayer. His appeal was made to one in whom there was power and authority, and to one whose own promise he was pleading. When we are coming to Jesus we ought to first consider who he is, and then be sure that we come with some promise of God in our mouth with which to plead our case. Every sinner may so come to Jesus. He came into the world to save sinners, and he has given us distinct and repeated promises that whosoever calleth on his name shall be saved. It was this intel-

ligent faith in Christ as the Messiah which gave character to the prayer of Bartimeus, and strengthened him to persevere over all obstacles. The whole prayer of this remarkable man illustrates the frequent Scriptural instructions concerning prayer: the faith that must underlie it, the fervency with which it must be offered, the persistency with which our requests must be made, the specific manner in which we ought to frame our petitions. Like the publican, this man knew what his trouble was, and put his prayer into a single sentence. The blind man said: "That I might receive my sight." The publican said: "God be merciful to me a sinner."

II.—BARTIMEUS' PRAYER ANSWERED.

It is full of encouragement to us to note how much more tender and thoughtful of sinners and their needs Jesus is than his disciples. On several occasions we find the disciples, either through a false care for the Master, or an indifference to the needs and sufferings of those coming to him, or a selfish wish to be not troubled themselves or interrupted in their enjoyment of the company and companionship of Jesus, rebuking inquirers and coming sinners. "Send them away," they said to the Master concerning the hungry multitude; "send her away," they said again concerning the poor woman with an issue of blood; they rebuked the mothers who brought their little ones to him; and now we find some of his followers rebuking this eager man who desired his sight. But not so does Jesus bear himself toward poor sufferers, either in body or soul. The eager cry of the blind man caught his ear, his faith arrested his heart, and his persistency brought him to a stand-still. The woman came behind him in the press of people, as he was journeying, and touched him with her hand. That touch arrested him and brought healing to her. This man cried out to Jesus as the throng was passing by him. He could not seek him out and fall at his feet, or even touch him with his hand; so he cried out to him. It does not matter whether we fall at his feet, as the leper did, touch him with our hands, as the woman did, or cry out to him as this blind man did. The important thing is to have faith in him and press our suit. Look at the effect of this prayer upon Jesus.

1.—He heard his cry.—This is evident. No doubt he was either busily engaged in converse with his disciples, or, at least, was wrapped in profound thought, as he was nearing Jerusalem, where he was to be put to death; yet could he hear this importunate prayer of the blind but believing and persistent petitioner. It is an immense comfort to know that, amid all the vast concerns of the Son of God, and amid all

the million petitions that must be going up to him continually, he can distinguish the prayer of faith whenever it is offered.

2.—He stood still.—It is said that at the prayer of Joshua the sun stood still; but the prayer of this blind beggar brought the Sun of Righteousness to a stand-still, in the mid-heaven of his mercy, that he might shine light into his blind eyes and his darkened soul. He who would hush every harp in heaven to hear the cry of one sinner, now stands still to encourage a beggar who comes to him for healing. What delightful encouragement this is for every one who truly and earnestly seeks the help and mercy of the Son of God.

3.—He commanded him to be called.—Not only is Jesus ready to help him, but he sets his followers to work as ministers to him. A moment before these very ones had been rebuking and hindering him. Now, at the word of Christ, the hinderers are turned into helpers. They go to him with comforting words and say to him: "Be of good comfort; rise, he calleth for thee." The grace of God in Christ Jesus turns all the disciples into servants for the help of coming sinners. He who sent Philip to the eunuch in the desert, now sends these followers to the beggar to cheer him and bring him into his presence. This should not only be an encouragement to sinners, but an instruction to those of us who are followers of Christ.

4.—He asked him what he wanted.—This Jesus did, not because he did not know, but to draw out from the man specifically what his heart was longing for. His prayer had been general in form: "Have mercy on me." Jesus now will have him make it specific. No doubt there were many things that the beggar might have asked for; but the one thing he wanted above all others was his sight. Sight to him would mean every thing. The one thing we need is forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Let us be specific in our prayers and deal with our loving Lord, who asks us this question in such a way as to make us sure that he stands ready to grant every thing or any thing that it may be best and right for us to have.

5.—He granted him his prayer.—"Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." Thus, he not only healed him of his blindness, but comforted him with the assurance that his faith had had much to do with his healing. Not that it was a meritorious cause of it, but an instrumental cause. His faith had laid hold on omnipotence, and omnipotence had healed him. This would teach him the value of faith in other cases, and encourage him to live a life of faith. Jesus has ever taught the importance of faith in respect to all the operations of his grace toward us. We ought to cultivate, cherish, and use it; live by it and work with it.

The faith of this man was of a kind that may well be a pattern to us. It first led him to cry out to Jesus; it magnified Christ's office and did honor to his person; it pleaded his word; and led its possessor to immediate and prompt action when once he got the command to come to Christ; it was too eager to be impeded by his cloak. If that hindered him he would cast it away. Why should he not? What was a cloak to his healing? How many respond to the call of the Gospel slowly, and seek to save every thing they have in coming to Christ. But this man put his great need before every thing else. His faith found both feet and hands to help him; his feet to run to Jesus and his hands to fling away any thing which impeded him. Christians may learn a lesson from this. The Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts us to lay aside the sin that doth so easily entangle us (xii, 1, 2). By this is meant unbelief, which is likened to a loosely flowing robe which wraps itself about us, entangling itself about our legs, and prevents us from running with patience the race that is set before us. But the beggar's faith did not fall into disuse when he had once received his sight. He had more use for it now, and it led him to join himself to the company of disciples, and he followed Jesus in the way. Sometimes we see sinners who seem eager enough to be saved, but are content to go their way without going Jesus' way. We need faith as much with which to follow Jesus as to come to him.



LESSON XIII.

I.—REVIEW.

A review of the preceding lessons, either upon the Golden Texts, or upon the leading incidents and teachings of the lessons themselves.

II.—A TEMPERANCE LESSON.—Eph. v, 15-21.

In case it is not considered best to review the Lesson, the teacher may substitute for review, a Temperance Lesson based on the following Scripture:

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.—Eph. v, 15-21.

III.—A MISSIONARY LESSON.—Isa. xxxv, 1-10.

If neither the review nor the Temperance Lesson is desirable, the following alternative Missionary Lesson is suggested:

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.—Isa. xxxv, 1-10.



LESSON XIV.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY.—Mark xi, 1-11.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee.—Zech. ix, 9.

And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way; and others cut down branches off the trees, and strewed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.—Mark xi, 1-11.

All four of the evangelists note this remarkable entry into Jerusalem by Jesus, five days before his death. The particulars given by each are substantially the same, though some add incidents which Mark leaves out, and Mark adds one or two which the others have omitted. (Matt. xxi, 1; Luke xix, 29; John xii, 14.) This entry into Jerusalem just before Christ's death, and when he certainly knew what it would lead to, is remarkable, as illustrating to us the deliberateness with which he moved forward toward his predestined death. He steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem; and when he came to the city where he was to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies, mocked, scourged, and crucified, he did not falter or shrink from his purpose. He does not enter the city secretly, or in any way seek to avoid publicity; nor, on the other hand, is there any bluster, defiance, affectation of power, or other act of his to inflame the multitude to stand between him and the malice of his enemies. All is calm, dignified, meek, and lowly.

Yet amid the humble surroundings, the mean appearance of his mounting, and the attendant multitudes, with their coats and palm branches, what kingliness is there in this entry of our Lord into Jerusalem! He is not, in any way, cast down or disquieted; for unto this hour and the end so soon to follow, had he come into the world. Yet he goes forth to meet his appointed death as a King, in the full consciousness of his mission and majesty. He will clearly intimate to his murderers by his own bearing and by that which he permits the populace to do, that he is their King. The lowly circumstances in connection with the royal and kingly intent, shall intimate to them that his humble ministry on earth and all the absence of earthly splendor, is not to be interpreted as being against his real kingship. He will, even by this humble but triumphant entry, suggest to them their mistake and, perhaps, recall them to a remembrance of what the prophets had said of him; for, though Mark does not mention the fact, yet Matthew does, this humble entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on the foal of an ass, was to be one of the signs of the Messiah when he should come. (See the Golden Text, Zech. ix, 9.) It is surprising how palpably we overlook the plainest Scriptures when we give ourselves up to our own thinking and become wedded to our own ways and desires. The disciples, later on, were as blind to his sayings concerning his resurrection as the Pharisees were to the Scriptures concerning his humiliation.

I.—THE PREPARATION FOR THE ENTRY.

The presence of Jesus at Bethany was known to the people, for he had been there some days. It was at this visit that he had raised Lazarus from the dead, and the whole country round about were excited over this wonderful miracle; the chief priests were greatly agitated over it, and were already consulting how they might put Lazarus to death, lest the living presence of such a witness might be so potent with the people that they could not prevent them rising up and making Jesus king. It was the time of the feast of the Passover, and in addition to the multitudes who came up to that feast on ordinary occasions, a much larger company were swarming to the Holy City, because they heard that Jesus, the great Teacher, would be there. (See John xii.) Jesus makes his preparations most carefully and deliberately. He knows well how he is to enter the city, and has foreseen every event. He and his companions were on the highway to the city. At a certain point he detaches two of his disciples and sends them into one of the neighboring villages to secure and bring to him the ass's colt, on which he is to ride in humble triumph into the city. In these details we catch

some glimpses of the powers of his Godhead shining through his humiliation.

1.—Our Lord's Omniscience.—He needed not to be told where he could find an ass with a foal. Mark mentions only the foal, or ass's colt, but Matthew mentions the mother ass with the foal. It was the foal on which Jesus rode, not the old ass. This apparent discrepancy is easily reconciled by the general intent of the story. The point is that Jesus saw it all, as if it had been present to his natural sight, just as he saw Nathanael sitting under the fig-tree, and marked his sincere intent to know and do the truth. (John i, 48.) Moreover, he knew the hearts of men, and could assure his disciples that if any question were asked or objection made to their taking the ass, a mere mention of the fact that the Lord had need of him, would be sufficient. He could see the hearts of men as well as outward things in most distant places. Before men hearts are as opaque bee-hives, but before Jesus they are as glass bee-hives, and all our inward thoughts are clearly seen. This omniscience of Jesus is a most comfortable thing for us to know, because it assures us that our King, who has taken the government upon his shoulders and made promises to us, knows all things (the end from the beginning), and has made his promises accordingly.

2.—Our Lord's authority.—Kings are wont in times of need to impress the property of others; that is, to make a levy. The need of the king is the sufficient warrant. But much more does *this* King have right to take the ass for his need. It was his before it belonged to the earthly owner; it was his while it was in the earthly owner's possession. When our Lord asks for things in our possession, he asks for what he might demand. This principle of the Lord's rights in creation and rightful authority over all living things—men, animals, and trees—is sufficient to explain many things which the unthinking urge as difficulties. Thus, in the Old Testament many stories are to be explained by our Lord's right to destroy and levy on all kinds of property; to send forth his decree to even slay men and nations, which he does now, sometimes by pestilence and famine, and constantly by the ordinary processes of disease, old age, and death. Death is an appointment of the Lord, and not an accident of nature or a mere blind outcome of physical forces. If he chooses to hasten his decree of death against any by the use of the sword, who shall say him nay? Much more has he the right to destroy a herd of swine, blast a fruitless fig-tree, or temporarily take possession of an ass.

3.—Our Lord's need.—"Say, the Lord hath need of him." This was to be the sufficient answer to any question which might be asked. It is a most wonderful thing that our Lord, who is the Crea-

tor and Maker of all things, should have need; and yet he has so graciously ordered the affairs of this universe that he deigns to make himself dependent on the ministry of his people. He has need of many things. His whole life on earth was one of dependence upon others. He borrowed a home of his disciples; he was ministered to by the gifts of both men and women; he borrowed a boat in which to cross the sea or to use as a pulpit; he borrowed an ass on which to make his entry as king into the Holy City; he borrowed a room, and all its appointments, in which to celebrate the last supper with his disciples; and, finally, he borrowed a tomb in which to lay his body when it had been crucified. But if the Lord has need, it is most blessed to know that it is ours to supply his needs out of such things as we have. This privilege he grants us. There is no day now in which our Lord is not calling upon us to supply his need. He needs our hearts and our love; he needs our service and our property; we are to light the world for him; to be his witnesses; we are to supply his treasury with money to carry forward his work in the world; we are to take care of his poor; we are to serve him with time and talent. Alas, that so much of our property is "tied to the door" of our own houses, and kept for our own use, and must be sent for by a word of authority. But it is of the Lord's grace that he takes it upon himself to send and "loose" these things. Let us hold our property as being loose for the Lord, and send on word to him in advance: "Lord, if there be aught that I have, and that thou needest, send for it, I pray thee. It is at thy command, be it much or little. I can go afoot when it shall please thee to ride on my colt."

4.—The disciples' obedience.—There is a double obedience here. First, the two who were sent from the immediate company went with promptness and alacrity to get the colt for Jesus. Perhaps they may have felt some reluctance in going to take possession of another's property so unceremoniously. We often feel reluctant to do the Master's will because of some difficulty, unpleasantness, or embarrassment which we foresee in the way; but if we will go promptly at his bidding, armed with his word of authority and explanation to those who may question, we shall doubtless get through with our commission as safely as the disciples did in the case before us. Then, again, he to whom the colt belonged may possibly have been among those who believed, so that when the word came, "The Lord hath need of him," he was quite ready to have him "loosed" and taken away to Jesus. The disciples' obedience is in doing as well as giving, and in giving as well as doing. Why should we not thus be ready to obey in giving and doing? Is it not an obedience and gift to him who

has supplied all our need, and will supply it, even according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus? We are comforted and cheered with the thought that Jesus, in this great preparation, called upon poor men to be his ministers. The two disciples who acted as his ambassadors in the matter of the ass's foal, were probably but fishermen; certainly, not nobles; and he who owned the ass was probably but a poor man who rode on the mother of this lowly and humble beast. Christ took service from poor men, and asked but humble gifts in order to ride into Jerusalem as King of Glory. Let all who are his, whether high or low, know that the Lord has need of them and theirs; the high as well as the low, the humble gifts of the poor as well as the great gifts of the rich and mighty.

II.—THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY.

All things being now ready, the glorious procession began to move. The people furnished their garments for a saddle, as they did to Jehu when he was proclaimed king (II. Kings, ix, 13); then they strewed his way with palm branches and shouted the loud hosannahs in which they proclaimed and hailed him king. Thus, in the midst of this throng of enthusiastic followers and voluntary subjects, he made his entry into Jerusalem. We may note some of the particulars.

1.—**The humility of his entry.**—At the first glance, this procession must have had something of the grotesque about it. He does not enter as a mighty monarch, riding on a prancing war-horse, richly caparisoned and glittering with bright ornaments; no crown is upon his head, no cohort of soldiers surrounds him, no flashing swords and gleaming spears announce to the distant on-lookers his coming; there is no blast of bugle, blare of military band, or booming of cannon. He is attired in his ordinary habit, rides upon an ass, seated on the common outer garments of the people who furnished them, amid a crowd of common people, women and children as well as men, who followed after and shouted their acclamations. But this humble march was in keeping with his whole ministry. He was born in a manger, of a peasant maiden, the espoused wife of a carpenter; he had been a mechanic, working at the humble trade of building small boats for fishermen; he had, during his public ministry, been the friend of publicans and sinners, and now that he allows himself to be proclaimed king—nay, now that he proclaims himself king—he is equally humble and lowly; and yet, further on, he will be numbered with transgressors and mount to his throne from the cruel and disgraceful cross. Yet is he no less a glorious king because he became a man, and clothed his glory in gar-

ments of humiliation. Let us remember that Jesus did not cease to be God because he became man; he did not cease to be the Lion of Judah because he became the Lamb of God; he did not cease to be holy because he was the friend of publicans and sinners; he did not cease to be rich because he became poor for our sakes; he did not cease to be the Judge of men because he was condemned by sinners; he did not cease to be glorious because he humbled himself and was put to shame; nor did he cease to be the King Eternal because he became the servant of sinners and rode into his royal city on earth upon an ass's colt. There will come a time when he will ride forth in all his majesty, not seated on an ass, but on a horse, clothed in fine linen, with many crowns upon his head; out of his mouth shall go a sharp sword, and on his vesture will be written KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (Rev. xix, 11-16.)

2.—His companions.—These were made up of a motley mass of poor people. The chief priests, nobles, and rulers were not there. The disciples who had followed him from Galilee, the enthusiasts who had joined him at Jericho, the friends he had left behind him at Bethany, whom he now associated with himself again; the country people who had heard of and believed him; a great company of women and little children; all these, and only such as these, were with Jesus as he rode forward. "You see your calling, brethren; how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." In this multitude there were many who were but superficially attached to him, moved by the momentary popularity which had flamed up around him, only to cool off under the frowns of the priests, and finally be stirred to an opposition cry of "Crucify him; crucify him!" Yet there were among the number many sincere souls whose hearts were the altars on which heavenly fires of love and devotion to Zion's King had been kindled; even as in the multitude of formal and superficial professors to-day there are some sincere and honest disciples who hail and worship Jesus as both Saviour and King.

3.—The homage of the people.—This was fourfold. First, there was undoubted enthusiasm. Many really believed Jesus was the Messiah, and eagerly welcomed him as such. They recalled his words, his miracles, the majesty of his bearing, the kindness of his manner, the hopes he had inspired, the wisdom and power of his teachings. They were convinced. Then they offered him their coats, a tribute from their scanty means. These were not great gifts, but they were such as they had, and they freely gave them for his use. Then, they paid him a worshipful tribute in that they cut down palm branches and strewed them in his way. This was at once an expres-

sion of their belief in him as king, and their devotion to him as loyal subjects. Then, there was confession and proclamation, in which they cried out in Hebrew phraseology: "Long live the King!" They blessed him; they blessed the name of the Lord in which he came; they blessed the kingdom of David, their father, so long promised, and now, as they believed, so happily come. Thus, in their shouts they united Jesus with the name and power of Jehovah, and with the Messianic kingdom, finding in him the fulfillment of all those prophecies so long the object of their hopes and their prayers. So should we receive him. He deserves our enthusiasm, our best gifts, our worship, the open and glad confession of our lips, and the public committal of ourselves to his cause.

III.—JESUS ENTERS THE TEMPLE.

His march into the city was so accompanied with the enthusiasm of the people, that the rulers were for the time overawed. The people in the city took up the cry of the procession, and multitudes of them joined his company. No doubt they were convinced for the moment that the long-expected King had come. They had their ideas of what that kingdom was, though they were mistaken ideas. But others said in a cold, annoyed, or indifferent way: "This is only Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth." Entering the city, Christ proceeded directly to the Temple, as its rightful master and king; he to whom the whole Temple pointed. He fulfilled the prediction of Malachi (iii, 1) by suddenly appearing there, though they who professed to seek for him were not prepared to receive him. He did not at once proceed to clear the Temple of its polluters and of the vile merchandise with which the band of thieves had filled it; but he calmly looked about it, as a judge reviewing the case before him, before proceeding to pass sentence and execute judgment. Perhaps the reason why he did not at once purge the Temple, was to give the rulers another day or night in which to think over the whole matter and come to a better and truer mind concerning him and his claims upon them as their king. Jesus was always slow to close the case against sinners. He wept over the city and the Temple (Luke's account) as he entered Jerusalem, and now he hesitated before pronouncing judgment. Having looked about him, he departed quietly, and went back to Bethany to spend the night, before coming again the next day to finish his work. So does Jesus make his appearance in and to many hearts. He comes in mercy and not in wrath; but if his coming is not heeded, then he will proceed to judgment. Every man's life is a temple which God has built for himself.

If we turn it into a den of thieves, and give it up for a temple of Baal and to the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life, then will the coming of Christ to take possession be a coming which we can not abide. And yet after coming and looking about, he gives us time to repent and receive him in the name of his God.

LESSON XV.

THE REJECTED SON.—Mark xii, 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—He came unto his own, and his own received him not.—John i, 11.

And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his well beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. And have ye not read this Scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people; for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.—Mark xii, 1-12.

The next day, after having purged the Temple of the money-changers and rebuked the rulers of the people for their apostasy and unfaithfulness, he was still teaching the people and working miracles. The enraged and baffled priests, scribes, and elders determined, if possible, to turn the tide of popular favor against him, drew near in a body, and demanded of him by what authority he did these things; that is, by what right he took upon himself authority over the Temple and its worship. Instead of answering them directly, he put them a question concerning the authority of John the Baptist—"Was it from heaven or of men?" This was a baffling question, and they at once saw that he had confounded their craft and put them to confusion before the people. Yet this is the grace of Christ, that though he does not answer them directly he will, by a parable, reply to their question in such a way as to convict them of their sin, proclaim the forbearance of God, give them another opportunity to repent by warning them of their sin and contemplated wickedness against him, and at the same

time, by thus laying open the whole question to their quick understanding, tell them what his authority is by indirectly telling them who he is. His subtle exposition of the past history of their class (the rulers), his equally subtle but plain unveiling to their understanding their own hearts' purpose concerning him, must have convinced them that he knew their hearts, and so was none other than that Son and heir of whom he spoke in the parable. This, it is apparent, they clearly understood, and yet they persisted in their purpose and rushed madly upon him in defiance of all consequences. Such is the blindness and recklessness of sin and unbelief when they finally take possession of a man.

I.—THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD.

The structure of this parable was very familiar to the rulers, and would be easy of interpretation to them, not only because vine culture was the most prominent industry among them, but because they were familiar with the figure of the vineyard in the teaching of their prophets. They must at once have called to mind how David had sung of the vine that God had brought out of Egypt, and having cast out the heathen, planted it in the land he had given them, caused it to take deep root, prosper and grow until it had covered the Palestine hills and filled all the land. (Ps. lxxx, 8-11.) This, of course, referred to Israel. They must have recalled how Isaiah had also used this figure to set forth God's goodness to Israel in planting and cherishing his people above all people; the prophet's song of the well beloved and his vineyard in a very fruitful hill, fenced and cleared of stones, and planted and provided with every convenience for harvesting the grapes; and how the prophet, in his song, lamented that instead of bringing forth grapes it had brought forth wild grapes. (Is. v, 1-7.) Jeremiah also had likened Israel to a noble vine planted in a noble land which had degenerated into a "plant of a strange vine." (Jer. ii, 21.) Our Lord now takes up these parables, and adapting them to the present circumstances, teaches them the awfully solemn and searching lesson found in our study.

1.—The vineyard.—Of course this refers to the people of Israel, whom God, the "certain man," had brought out of Egypt and planted in their land and fenced about with his special providences, and furnished with every thing needful for their culture and fruitfulness. He had given them a revelation of himself such as no other people ever had; he had given them a law perfect in its statutes, ordinances for their guidance, teachers for their instruction, judges and great captains

for their protection and defense. What more could he have done for his vineyard than he had done?

2.—The husbandmen.—The husbandmen were the priests and the elders, to whom he had committed the care of the people, and to whom he looked for the faithful culture of his vineyard. The people were the vines planted in the land; they, the priests and elders, were their rulers and teachers. They were the responsible class. As they were faithful, so would the people bring forth the fruit of righteousness which God desired, and be the means of establishing religion in the world. As they were unfaithful and careless of their divine commission and selfish in their purposes, using their time and opportunities not for the good of the people and the glory of God, but for their own profit, adding field to field and house to house, and usurping every thing that belonged to God to their own use, the people would be neglected, and become a prey to every false religion and sink into a degenerate and strange plant. (Is. v, 7, 8.) Now the rulers and priests before him were the degenerate successors of those false teachers who had gone before them. His parable was intended to set their sin and wickedness plainly before them.

3.—The absence of the owner.—The parable tells us that the owner of the vineyard, having done every thing for his vineyard that was necessary and committed it to husbandmen in trust for himself, went into a far country. This is significant. God does not always manifest his presence with his word and institutions; that is, he is not visibly present by signs and wonders. He furnishes us with truth and grace, and bids us be faithful to our opportunity and responsibility, warning us that he will come again to receive from us the fruit of our lives, and demand of us an accounting of our stewardship. This was true, not only of the Jews, but in the parables of our Lord, bearing on the present constitution of his vineyard, he tells us the same thing. He has given to every man his work, and bids us be faithful and watch. He may seem to the world to be absent from the Church; he may seem to some cold-hearted and careless professors to be absent and unmindful of whether they are faithful or negligent; he may seem to some over-anxious Christians to be indifferent to his Church and to his Gospel; therefore, do they seek after signs and wonders by miracles, and healings and visions and extraordinary revelations. But this is contrary to all his doings. He planted the vineyard with his own hand. While he was doing this, his presence was marked by signs and wonders, but now he leaves the culture of it to his servants. He will come again, in power and great glory, when he makes a final reckoning with his stewards. God came to the faithless

Jews in the first advent of Jesus; he will come to the Church in the second advent. Meantime, it is for us, one and all, to be faithful, attend to our work, and bring forth fruit unto him.

II.—THE SEARCH AFTER FRUIT.

Having planted Israel, a fruitful vine, and committed the care of the vineyard to the rulers appointed to this work, leaving it in their hands for culture, he sends from time to time for returns in fruit. This lesson is taught in the parable of the fig-tree which he planted in his vineyard. (Luke, xiii.)

1.—A reasonable expectation.—Every man who plants a vineyard has a reasonable expectation of getting fruit from it. God had a right to expect fruit from the Jews. Considering all he had done for them (and what more could he have done ?), he reasonably expected that the rulers would have made his name glorious, and trained and developed the people into a strong and righteous nation, who would love righteousness and hate evil. He has a similar right to expect that we shall bring forth fruit for him. We also are branches of a fruitful vine, planted under still better conditions. If we abide in him, we shall bring forth much fruit, glorify God the Father, and prove ourselves to be his true disciples. (John, xv.) Considering all he has done for us, he has a right to expect fruit from us as well or even more than from them. This is a reasonable expectation in view of his right; in view of his goodness to us; in view of the end sought, which is not only his glory, but our good; not merely our temporary good in this world, but our salvation; that is, our entire recovery from sin to holiness, from death to life, from self to God. If he needs fruit and expects it, much more do we need the fruit which is to grow out of and into our lives.

2.—The fruit sought for.—Of the Jews he sought judgment and righteousness, mercy and truth, obedience and holiness; in a word, a reflection in their own lives of his own glorious character. Instead, they did but produce an empty formalism, in connection with which they developed every form of oppression, unrighteousness, covetousness, and hypocrisy. Who can read the history of Israel without shuddering at their base ingratitude, and wondering at the depths of their iniquity? But of us he demands fruits, not only of the same kind, but even of a better kind, and more of it. Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; faith, hope, and love; indeed, all the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, and whatsoever is just, lovely, and

of good report. In a word, we are expected to show forth the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

3.—His patience with the husbandmen.—Again and again he sent to them prophets to remind them of their trust, and to secure from them the rightful returns from the vineyard; but they were provoked at these intrusions upon them. They had grown selfish, and wished not to render unto God any account at all. They were content with the temporal advantages which they had secured from God's providence. They cared not for the spiritual culture of the people nor for the glory of God; they cared only for their own glory, their earthly profits and temporal power, therefore they refused to hear the prophets whom God sent them. They sent them away empty; they began to maltreat them, to beat them, to stone them, and finally to kill them. Our Lord had again and again reminded them of this history; they had stoned the prophets and killed them that were sent to them. This was the charge which Stephen laid against them, adding to it that all had culminated in the murder of Christ. And yet they were hypocritically saying that, had they lived in the days of their fathers, they would have cherished these men; therefore, they builded splendid tombs over the dead prophets and garnished their sepulchers, and yet they were about to do a thing in comparison with which all the sins of all their fathers would seem to be as nothing. We can not but wonder at the patience of God in his dealings with the Jews. Who has not felt this while reading the Old Testament history? And yet that same patience is being manifested with us in our day, who are little better than they. We are selfish, worldly, unheeding of many warnings, formal, bent on getting possession of this world rather than preparing ourselves for the world to come. We are more anxious to possess ourselves of our neighbors' property than to win them to God; we appreciate the benefits of the Church as a civilizing power, but are not diligent to attach ourselves to Jesus Christ as a sanctifying life; we seek our own glory and pleasure, in and out of the Church, rather than to magnify the name of God and make men to see, by our good works, the glory of our Father in heaven. And yet God is patient with us. From age to age he has sent forth special servants, raised up great preachers and teachers to call the people back to their allegiance to him and to the purpose of grace he has toward us.

III.—SENDING THE SON.

After many years of patient waiting and long-suffering, we are told in the parable that "Having one son, his well beloved, he sent him

also last unto them, saying: 'They will reverence my son.' " The parable comes close home to them at this point. They had clearly seen the bearing of it all along. He will now tell them who he is. He is that son, the last messenger God will send to them, and him they will also kill, and thus fill up the cup of their wickedness. What grace is this that God has shown to a stiff-necked and ungrateful people? But let us not fail to stand before this mirror set up before the face of the Jewish priests and rulers, and look at ourselves in it also.

1.—Last of all.—Of old, God had spoken to them again and again by the prophets; but now, last of all, and for the last time, he speaks to them by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things. Surely, they will reverence him. God knew that they would murder Jesus Christ when he sent him into the world. Jesus knew, while he was talking to them in this parable, that they would not heed the teaching, and would go away, to plot more deeply for his death. Yet this is the grace of God, that his goodness shall have a complete fulfillment. They shall not be cut off till the last thing has been done to save them, and bring them back to himself. God's acting is based on the logic of righteousness. In the judgment of all intelligence that has morality in it all would say, that whatever they did to the servants they would surely pause in their wickedness, and refuse to lay their hands on God's well beloved Son, especially when he was sent, not with a message of judgment and death, but with one full of grace and truth. It is worth our while to remember that this last messenger to the Jews is also the last messenger to the world. God has taken up the Gentile world at the point where the Jewish nation cast him off. The long process will not be repeated with us. Jesus will patiently wait. God will be long-suffering, because he is not willing that any should perish; but he will send no more messengers to this world.

2.—The well beloved.—God has sent his Son, his well beloved. Not one of his sons, but his only Son. He has given to them and to us not only a great gift, but the greatest gift; all, in fact, that he has to give. In the gift of Jesus Christ to the world for our salvation, God has exhausted the resources of his grace. He has nothing more to give. If we reject him as the Jews did, then there is no more sacrifice for sin. God has nothing more to give. Infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, and power are exhausted in Christ; in him all the fullness of the Godhead resides.

3.—This is the heir.—Here we have an awful revelation of the utter wickedness of the Jews in rejecting him: that is, of the rulers. They said, "This is the heir." By this, Jesus meant to reveal to them

their thoughts. They were, in their deepest consciousness, well aware who he was. They did not confound him with prophets and servants. This is the heir. The people, in their ignorance, crucified him; but the rulers did it in their malice, knowing him to be the Son of God. At the least, it is clear that they had this secret misgiving that Jesus was the true Messiah, yet they would not yield to him. Herod in his heart feared that the infant Jesus was the "King of the Jews," else would he not have sent forth to slay him. He knew that if the true King were come, then his dreams of power were gone. The Council were halted once by the advice of Gamaliel, because they secretly feared that to go further would be to fight against God. When he was crucified, they feared he would rise again, and so sought to prevent it. All this shows how deeply in their hearts they knew he was the Son of God, though their pride, avarice, and lust of power carried them against their convictions and led them on to the awful crime of crucifying the Lord of Glory. The mass of the people did not discern this so fully, if at all. Therefore, it was said to them: "We wot that through ignorance ye did it." But this was not true of the rulers.

4.—How they received him.—Though they knew him, they took counsel to kill him. "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." Here is a full revelation of the awful crime they were on the brink of committing. This is the blindness and monstrous folly of sin when it has brought forth fully. They will, even in the face of the knowledge that Jesus is Jehovah-God, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, yet stretch forth their hand to kill him. What madness! Will they fight against God, after all? Can they hope to win? Can they kill God, and take possession of the world? They will try, at least. Jesus intimates that which they are about to do. "They took him and dragged him out of the vineyard and killed him." "So shall you take me and drag me out of the city and crucify me." We shudder at the wickedness and awful folly of these sin-maddened rulers, but is not this what many are doing now? Multitudes of people are fully persuaded that Jesus is the Son of God, or at the very least, they have a secret misgiving that he is none other. Still they reject him. They turn infidel and denounce him; they fight against him, and seek by every means to destroy him by destroying his cause. The Bible, the Church, and every institution that is called by his name, including his people, are the object of their hatred. Others, less bold, take refuge behind these bolder ones to justify their unbelief.

IV.—THE JUDGMENT.

“What, therefore, shall the Lord of the vineyard do?” he asks them, and, taking their answer out of their mouth (Matt. xxi, 41), adopts it for the sentence which he now pronounces against them.

1.—The sentence against the Jews.—“He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and give the vineyard to others!” Here is the doom of the Jews. How faithfully it has been carried out! They have been cast off; turned out of the vineyard; and the Gentiles have been called in to possess the grace of God. This is also the judgment against the willful unbeliever. They perish, but the same Gospel they refuse is made the power of God unto salvation to them that believe. The unbelief of some does not render the Gospel powerless to save others.

2.—The head of the corner.—Jesus in this parable fearlessly proclaims his own death, as he has all along steadily done; but though he saw death before him, and repeatedly spoke of it, he never despaired of his kingdom. The proverb concerning the stone rejected by the builders becoming the head of the corner, is a clear prophesy of his future triumph and glorious honor in spite of his present rejection and imminent dishonor by death on the cross. This result he ascribes to the power of God in bringing things to pass. “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” How marvelous it is in the eyes of all those who have eyes to see, that Jesus, the rejected and crucified, is still the regnant one, and certainly destined to triumph over all sin and opposition.

3.—Still defiant.—Notwithstanding the parable and its palpable teaching, which they clearly understood, they went away defiant and determined to carry out their purpose. So do sinners in their blind unbelief and deliberate purpose not to submit to God’s grace in Christ. “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.” (Acts xiii, 40, 41.)

LESSON XVI.

THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS.—Mark xii, 28–34.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Love is the fulfilling of the law.—Rom. xiii, 10.

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is but one God; and there is none other but he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.—Mark xii, 28–34.

Jesus was surrounded by his enemies, who were determined to get some advantage over him. They had challenged his authority and been worsted by his counter-question in reference to John the Baptist, and put to confusion by his parable of the Vineyard and the Husbandman. They next sent some expert lawyers, hoping to entangle him in a matter of politics, and were again brought to confusion by the unexampled discrimination of his answer. Then the Sadducees came forward with a speculative question concerning the future state and the relations existing there between man and wife, and they, in turn, were utterly routed by his deep discernment of the true nature of human relations both in respect to earth and heaven. Among the number of those who had come out to join with his enemies in bringing about his defeat, or, at least, to enjoy his discomfiture, was a scribe who, at least, if an enemy, was a more candid one than his confederates. He had evidently been impressed with the singular mastery Jesus had shown over all the questions which had been put him, and his superior ability in all matters of casuistry; and especially was he surprised and pleased with his clear insight into the spiritual nature of things, as brought out in response to the question touching divorce as

practiced by the Jews and countenanced by Moses, and the future state of the dead. More candid than the rest, and compelled into a respectful attitude toward Jesus, he asks a question. It was not a captious one, as had been the others, but was asked with sincere intent. They, his companions, had challenged his authority; this scribe would now test his wisdom, for he perceived that there was more in Jesus than was to be found in a mere usurper and pretender. There can be no final authority where there is not final wisdom. So the scribe reasoned, and went straight to the bottom of the question at issue, not by seeking minute interpretations of secondary duties, but by challenging him on the one point which would bring out from him an answer that would reveal the depth or shallowness of his authority as a teacher and commander of the people.

I.—A GREAT QUESTION ANSWERED.

It is by questioning and answers that we come at the truth, especially if our questions are sincere and he who answers is full of wisdom. Jesus is the one Teacher who ever appeared on the earth who could answer exhaustively any question put to him, for he is the Truth. His answers are not the shrewd guesses of an extraordinary genius, not wise answers of a profound philosopher; he answers out of his own consciousness. Through him the answer to all questions comes direct from the fountain head. Never man spake as this man, and never man taught with such authority. His profound wisdom had, before this, excited the wonder of those who heard him, especially since he was but a carpenter from a mean little hill town in Galilee, and had never been trained in the schools. If we have burdensome questions on our mind let us bring them to Jesus, for if ever they are to be satisfactorily answered, Jesus must answer them.

1.—The great question.—"Which is the first commandment of all?" That is, not which commandment stands first in order upon the tables of stone, but which commandment is first in importance, which goes to the root of the whole matter in respect to our duty to God? This answered well and truly, it will not be difficult to find a solution for all other questions, or a commandment to guide in all lesser duties. The soul of man is haunted by a conviction of the existence of God and burdened with a sense of obligation and responsibility to him. This innate conviction and sense of responsibility lies at the foundation of all religion, and has set men in all ages, the low as well as the high, the ignorant as well as the cultured, to make inquiry after God, and to ascertain what his will is concerning man. For if there be a

God at all, he must have rights in us and we must be responsible to him, and that responsibility must be discharged in the light of his commandment, and can never be discharged unless we know what the first and chiefest of all his commandments is—the one which contains in its essence all other commandments. True wisdom in man, therefore, seeks not a part of the truth, but the whole truth—that is, the final truth—so that there may be no new surprises for which we are unprepared. If we may know and discharge the chief duty to God, all minor duties are simple and easy. The reason why so many so-called inquirers after truth fail both in finding and doing, is that they are not seeking as this scribe did, for the final truth of all. The rich young ruler came seeking after truth, but only from the point of inquiry involved in his desire to inherit eternal life. He did not get any thing like so full an answer as this scribe did. Men and women ask questions about sin, about the future, and the hows and wherefores of many things, but rarely ask to know the whole truth concerning God and their relations to him in respect to obedience. Saul of Tarsus arose to this height of inquiry when he fell at the feet of Jesus on his way to Damascus, and cried out: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” He went beyond the scribe in his question, for in it he signified his willingness to know and his readiness to do the truth.

2.—The question answered.—Jesus is always ready to answer all questions, especially to those who are ready to hear the answer as well as to put the question. He never turned an inquirer away, whether he was sincere or captious; and, as before remarked, he answers according to our desire for knowledge, and, usually, so far beyond it as to awaken in our minds other questions, especially if we are sincere. But his method of answer is usually from the point of view of the inquirer. So he answered Nicodemus, the young ruler, and now the scribe. In his answer to the scribe, he enlarges the question and opens up to his inquirer's mind truths beyond his inquiry; or, perhaps, covering the latent inquiry of his soul, as though he had said: “I will answer your question and carry it further, that you may think even more deeply than you are now doing.” (a) *Concerning God himself.* Jesus was soon to be accused as a blasphemer, but that he is no blasphemer must have been apparent from this noble prologue to his answer to the scribe. “Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, is one Lord.” In this we have two great thoughts. The first is that God is One. If there be many gods, or more than one god, then there can be no final authority in any commandment. But God is one, over all and blessed forever. Man's obedience is not to be divided up between many gods. He has not to pay court or render obedience to many

gods presiding each over different localities or departments of being. God is everywhere sovereign and over every thing. If we are at one with him, then we are at one with every force of nature, and, under his protection, amid every distraction that may come to us. If there is something awe-inspiring in the thought of one Supreme God, who is over all and above all, this awe must be softened and sanctified by the thought that he is Jehovah to us. That is, that he is a God in covenant with himself for our good, and not for our evil. This name, JEHOVAH, uttered in connection with the absolute law of the moral universe, has in it the hint and promise of a Gospel which is to make the law perfect in respect to our salvation as well as to God's sovereign glory. If his law seems beyond our ability or power to keep it, we have in the fact that he is Jehovah a promise of his grace and help in respect to its provisions. Hence, Paul tells us that the Gospel is witnessed to by the law and the prophets. (Rom. iii, 21.) (b) *Concerning love and law.* The very first commandment is significant. "Thou shalt love." Not thou shalt obey, for that will follow if there be a disposition to love. For love is the fulfilling of the law. Not thou shalt fear, in the sense of being afraid with terror, for there can be no true obedience, inspired by such a fear. Thou shalt love. Thou shalt find in God the true center of thy whole being, the full and complete answer to thy soul's hunger, the utter supply for the soul's need, the perfect response necessary to complement thy imperfect being. "Love is the final act of the soul. It is the soul's essence seeking in some other object its final end. In its final consummation it is the soul's self embracing its perfect object." The command, then, is from love to love. It is the enunciation of that wonderful principle that "Love is law and law is love." If God commands us to love him, then it must follow that he loves us. We can only love him who loves us, and can only love him because he first loved us. In this law of love we have the far-away prophecy of that more wonderful revelation: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." It can only and always be a matter of amazement where Moses got this wonderful truth if, indeed, it did not come down to him directly from God. The details of the love required are in the nature of self-evident propositions. If God is supreme in his being, and is Love himself, then the only love he can require or accept, under the law of love, is a perfect one. Therefore, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." By the heart is to be understood the very core of our being, the seat of it, as the physical heart is the core and seat of our physical being. We are to love him

out of it; that is, our love to God must drain every part of our being. By the soul is meant our conscious existence. Not a mere instinctive love, but a conscious and voluntary one, as of things done in our waking moments, and not in dreams or frenzies. By our mind is meant the discriminating faculty of our being. We must love him intelligently and reasonably; not by mere command, which can not be, but by a knowledge of him, his perfections, and his love to us. And this love must be with all our strength; that is, with the full energy of heart, soul, and mind. Then our Lord adds to this: "And thy neighbor as thyself." This follows as a corollary. If there be but one God, and we are his offspring, then his love is toward all and for all; and, since his law calls all to find the true end of their being in him, we must meet our neighbor in that oneness of love that binds all together. We must love whom God loves, else we do not love God. How can we say that we love God if we love not our brother? If this command seems impossible, as it is to sinful and fallen man, we are lifted into gladness by the revelation of this law of love in Jesus Christ, who is God's love to us, and who is the end of the law to us and for us. We come to the Love of God by Jesus, and as we are united to him, we are enabled to realize the fulfillment of the law in ourselves by the energy of his love poured out in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us. (John iii, 16; Rom. v, 5, 8; viii, 3.)

II.—COMMENT AND COMMENDATION.

The answer of Jesus was so far-reaching, so perfectly satisfying to the scribe, so far beyond any thing he had expected to hear, that he could not refrain from an exclamation of praise and delight. The force of the scribe's reply was not that of mere dogmatic approval, but of enthusiastic and impulsive delight.

1.—Comment.—"Well said, Master!" "Beautiful!" "Excellent!" And, indeed, is not that marvelous first and chief commandment the most excellent and beautiful precept directed to the religious nature of man that the world has ever heard? Is it equaled by any thing that was ever said before; has it ever been surpassed since? "It is a suggestive fact, that while infidels have presumed to attack Moses the Lawgiver, and even him who is the great fulfiller of the law for us, the redeemer of us from the curse of it when broken, they have never touched the law itself. The perfection and glory of the ten commandments stand before the civilized world unimpeached as a perfect rule of right and wrong."

2.—Commendation.—The scribe was not only pleased and de-

lighted, as indicated by his striking and sententious comment, but went further, and commended the principle underlying this exposition of the law. "There is one God, and there is none other but he, and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, is better than all whole burnt offerings." This scribe saw that essence was better than form, and a spiritual worship better than all forms and ceremonies. Herein he showed a true spiritual insight and an appreciation of truth not common with his brother religionists. He was one of the advanced men, belonging in the class with Nicodemeus, and Nathanael, and Joseph of Arimathea, and Gamaliel. Forms and ceremonies are good in their place, but they are not to be confounded with the real essence of religion. This is something which we need evermore to keep before our minds and hearts. A truly spiritual man will not despise forms, but a mere formalist will never reach into the region of true worship.

III.—NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM.

If the scribe admired and commended Jesus for his answer, Jesus admired and heartily commended the scribe for his spiritual insight and frank and hearty recognition of the truth. He saw in him a man who was not far from the kingdom. The kingdom of God is, of course, not localized, but, as if it were, Jesus sees in this man one who, in his religious journey, has come nearly to his goal. The kingdom of God is that moral order or sphere where God reigns supreme in love and righteousness, and when any one enters within that sphere he is at one with God, and so saved from sin and moral disorder.

1.—**Near the kingdom of God.**—Here was a man who was near the kingdom. In what respect was he near, and when may any man be said to be near the kingdom? When, like this man, he is an inquirer who is at once thoughtful, sincere, independent, discriminating, and frank. This man was all that. It was evident that he had entertained deeper and more serious thoughts than the mere formalists and religious quibblers about him; that he was sincere, is seen in the directness and evident honesty of his question. He was an independent inquirer because he was ready to detach himself from the cabal with which he had at least some formal association; and, withal, was discriminating, and saw the difference between a mere formal observance of the law and a spiritual one. It is the lack of these qualities in most inquirers that prevent them from getting what they pretend to seek and entering into the kingdom of which they pretend to be in search.

2.—The significance of Jesus' remark to the scribe.—In those words of Jesus: "Thou art not far from the kingdom," may be noted these three things: (a) *A recognition of his spiritual proximity.* Jesus is not slow to discern the state of a man's mind toward himself—or, rather, toward God. He knew the true state of that other scribe's mind who professed to desire to follow him, until he found out that it may have meant fellowship with one who was poorer than the birds and foxes. He knew the state of the young ruler's mind who cared more for money than for eternal life, though he appeared to be very desirous of possessing life. So he knew the mind of Nicodemus, and led him on into the kingdom. We may be sure that like the father of the prodigal, Jesus will see us when even a great way off, if we are really coming to him. (b) *An encouragement.* When Jesus said: "Thou art not far from the kingdom," it was to encourage him. "You are near, come nearer; you are on the way; keep on in the same direction, and you will soon reach the kingdom; you are on the threshold, step over." He was now so near that it were a bitter pain to have him turn back or turn out of the pathway that would lead straight to God. If we will be the true servants of Christ, let us never fail to speak an encouraging word to any sincere inquirer. (c) *A warning.* There was danger as well as encouragement in his present state of mind. To be near was not to be in. Conviction is not conversion. A knowledge of spiritual things is not necessarily the possession of them. Almost persuaded is not altogether persuaded. Thousands of souls have come thus far and then turned back. Herod was once near the kingdom; the young ruler was near; the multitude that turned back was near; Felix and Agrippa were at one time near, so near that Paul hoped they would even become altogether such as he was. Many men, women, and children are near to God when they are brought under special influences of the Spirit, who yet, like the young ruler, turn back. It is a sad fact that many are enlightened concerning the truth and are almost persuaded, who stand with their feet just at the line which divides between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, and then turn back. We do not know, certainly, that this scribe did not finally accept Christ and enter the kingdom with him; but it is to be feared that he did not, else there would have been some mention of the fact. Yet let us hope that he did, since it is not said that he rejected the truth he had so intelligently sought after and so frankly acknowledged when he recognized it.

LESSON XVII.

DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE FORETOLD.—Mark

xiii, 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.—Matt. xii, 6.

And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled? And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows. But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.—Mark xiii, 1-13.

Turning from his honest inquirer, the scribe who was not far from the kingdom, Jesus, by a question put to the inquisitors who still stood about him, confounded them and put them to silence. The common people, who were in the company, heard him with gladness. To them he now turned and warned them against the scribes, Pharisees, and religious hypocrites, mercilessly exposing their wickednesses and false pretenses, and denouncing in the most unmeasured terms the judgment of God against them. In this last interview with his enemies, in which he finally breaks with them, his indignation rises to the

highest pitch. There is not in all language or literature so terrific a denunciation of human sin, wickedness, and folly as is contained in this last address of Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees, whom he denounces as hypocrites, serpents, and a generation of vipers, who have not only gathered up in themselves all the evil of their fathers, but have far exceeded them, so that the world's cup of wickedness and crime was about to be filled up by their last act; namely, his murder. And yet the address closes with one of the most pathetic laments ever uttered by human lips: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how oft would I have gathered thee." His great loving heart was well nigh breaking with sorrow even while he was denouncing the damnation of hell upon them. (Matt. xxiii, 37.)

Having finished this discourse, he turns and leaves the Temple for the last time; that is, until he is brought back two days after a prisoner, to be mocked, scourged, and crucified. His closing sentence to them was that their "house was left to them desolate, and that they should see him no more; that is, in his capacity of teacher and Messiah, until he should come in his glory. (Matt. xiii, 38, 39.) These ominous and significant remarks foreboded to the disciples some untoward calamity, which they associated with the Temple. They were not clear what was meant; but as they followed their sad and sorrowful Master out from the Temple, they spoke to him as if in inquiry and protest against any harm coming to the Temple. "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here." Can it be possible that such a building, so magnificent, so massively built with such stones, shall come to destruction? This was their thought. There was not only surprise, but grief and remonstrance, in their remark. As though they had said: "Master, look at it! It can not be! It must not be! Shall this glorious house of God be destroyed (desolated) for the sins of the rulers?" It was theirs as well as the rulers'. Like Peter, remonstrating against the prophesied death of Christ, these disciples remonstrate against the desolation of the Temple. Nor do we wonder at their confused thoughts, amazed wonder, and anxious desire for the stability of the Temple, which had been to them and the whole nation the center and seat of all their worship, the very sign and symbol of God's dwelling among them; the place where all their sacrifices were offered, and toward which they turned their faces when they prayed. Besides, he had evidently spoken of yet more astounding events that were pending, even the end of the world, of which the destruction of the Temple was but a faint prophecy. (Read Matt. xxiv, especially verse 3; and Luke xxi.)

I.—THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE FORETOLD.

The Temple at Jerusalem was accounted as one of the wonders of the world. In it was the perfection of architectural beauty. The massive stones with which its superstructure was constructed were of such size as to almost baffle the imagination; some of them, according to Josephus, were sixty and seventy feet in length, eight and ten feet in width, and seven and eight feet in thickness. The main Temple was surrounded with numerous buildings, courts, porches, colonnades, supported with beautiful pillars, and ornamented with magnificent gates and archways. Moreover, it had been adorned with precious stones and gifts (Luke xxi, 5); its magnificent dome was overlaid with pure gold, so that it is said that travelers approaching it when the sun was shining upon it saw in it, as it were, a great mountain of burning gold. It was all but "an eternal weight of glory." No wonder the disciples marveled, and were saddened at the thought of desolation coming to that (their) magnificent and almost worshiped Temple. To their surprised and grieved inquiry Jesus makes answer something like this: "You call my attention to these buildings and great stones; to its glory and beauty. You think its destruction will baffle man, that its desolation would be sacrilege. And will your hearts be wrung with sadness to see it all go down in destruction? I can well understand your thought and feeling; yet I now tell you plainly, that the time is rapidly drawing nigh when there shall not be one stone left upon another." Thus did Jesus foretell and pronounce the destruction of the Temple. We can imagine how he would say it: with great sadness, solemn voice, and judicial firmness. They did not comprehend the deep significance of the awful doom of the beautiful Temple, but its destruction is full of meaning to us as well as to them.

1.—It had ceased to be God's house.—Despite its divine origin, its massive structure, its exquisite beauty, and its sacred purpose, it no longer meant any thing religiously or spiritually. It was no longer God's house. A little before Jesus had spoken of it as "My Father's house." They had forgotten the Father, corrupted his worship in it, and turned it into a den of thieves; now, as he leaves it for the last time, he speaks of it as "Your house." "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." When any institution or ordinance which God has ordained is perverted and abused, it ceases to be his, and is doomed to destruction. Twice already had the Temple been destroyed, but their cup of iniquity was not full; the people were permitted to return and rebuild it. Now their iniquity was finished. In that very Temple the Lord of the Temple would shortly be condemned to death. The greater

than the Temple to which it pointed was rejected; the Temple would, therefore, be destroyed. The ordinances of ceremonial worship were of old turned into mere instruments of selfishness and hypocrisy. God refused to own them, and spoke of them with contempt as being theirs, and not his. "Your country is desolate;" "Your sacrifices" are purposeless; "Your new moons and feasts" are loathsome to my soul. (Is. i.) Thus does God speak of perverted ordinances. He will not own them as his, though he instituted them. The churches of Asia, when they ceased to represent him and do his work, were swept away, their candlestick as well as their light withdrawn. So it shall be with the false and worldly professor. "If any man defile the Temple of the Holy Ghost, him will God destroy." The destruction of the Temple is the judgment of all perverted ordinances.

2.—It marked the end of a dispensation, now passed away.—

The Temple was the type and prophecy of Jesus; the place of shadows, not of substance. The altars, and sacrifices, and priests, and mercy-seat all pointed to a better sacrifice—to a real substance; to a propitiation which would be efficient and sufficient. That ceremonial and prophetic dispensation was now at an end. Wherefore, God had no more use for the Temple. To have left it standing would have been a temptation to his true children and a snare to the unbelieving of the nation; they would have clung to the shadow and neglected the substance. He will, therefore, take away this, that they may more readily turn to Christ, who is its true interpretation and meaning.

3.—It was the beginning of judgment upon the Jews.—The true Messiah had come; they had rejected him and turned with pride and satisfaction to the Temple and its services. To abandon the Temple and take Jesus, was to give up place and power. So long as they could retain the Temple, they could retain place and power; therefore, they will murder Jesus and intrench themselves in the Temple. But God judges them for the crime of rejecting Christ, and begins to visit his desolating judgment upon that wicked and adulterous generation (nation) by destroying their Temple and driving them from the city at the sword's point. Two thousand years have almost passed away, and yet that fearful judgment begun at the destruction of the Temple has not yet run its course.

4.—It declares the temporary nature of all earthly glory.—

The Temple had its uses and its glory; but both were for a higher purpose than themselves. They pointed to unseen and eternal things; they must pass away, that the true substances of which they were the shadows might come into view. All that man builds in this world, of fortune, fame, and monument, may be good in its place and for the

time, but man's true possessions are in the unseen world. Therefore, we are taught that "the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are unseen are eternal." Therefore we look not (do not allow either our eyes or affections to rest upon) the things which are seen, but upon the things which are unseen, setting our affections on things above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. This world, with all its glory, must perish, but the word of the Lord and the eternal things which it promises shall endure forever. We are taught to look away from the seen and temporary, to the unseen and eternal. Man's earthly possessions and glory will, like uncertain riches, take to themselves wings; or else man himself will be suddenly called away from them as the rich fool was; then whose shall these things be? Wherefore, learn this lesson: Hold all earthly things but loosely in your hands, and lay hold on eternal life.

II.—THE END OF THE WORLD.

The talk concerning the destruction of the Temple led on to the consideration of that further and more awful desolation that was coming upon the whole world. We know that much which Jesus said at this time referred to that more momentous subject—his second coming and the desolating judgments that would usher in that event. Matthew records the question of the Apostles thus: "Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world?" The answer of Jesus to these questions was both vague and specific; vague enough to keep them (his present disciples) and all disciples who should come after them on the *qui vive* of expectation and inquiry, and yet specific enough to demonstrate that his predictions were not mere guesses and speculations of human forecast. The two events spoken of—the destruction of the Temple and his second coming and the end of the world—were blended together, as prophecy and fulfillment. The whole prophecy was telescopic; beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem, it would be drawn out at last until the full length of it would be reached at the end of the age of which he spake. There was to be an evolution of events, beginning with this nearer one and ending with that more distant one. The destruction of Jerusalem was but a miniature fulfillment of the grand prophecy of the destruction of the world. The appalling circumstances attending the first would be but a preface to the yet more appalling events attending the last. What he said to his present disciples concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and their demeanor in view of that event, he says to his disciples in all ages concerning their attitude and behavior in



view of the end of the world. The careful student will not have difficulty in disentangling this purposely ambiguous prophecy. It was a part of the wisdom and love of Jesus to throw over this whole subject a kind of veil, that we might be stimulated to study it the more eagerly. The first part of the prophecy, concerning the Temple, has been fulfilled; the second part, concerning his coming and the end of the world, awaits fulfillment, and we are admonished to watch, in view of its imminence. Consider the substance of his instructions.

1.—A warning.—"Take heed, lest any man deceive you." During the interim of time before the actual destruction of the Temple and city, many attempts would be made to deceive the disciples. False Christs would appear and deceive many. Their faith in him and his teachings would be assailed, and some would apostatize. This was actually true. It is true still, in reference to the greater and still pending event. Heresies of all kinds, false doctrine, denial of Jesus, and careless and sometimes almost wicked explaining away of the plain statements of the Scripture, will appear and be put forth. Scoffers will arise and inquire with derision: "Where is the promise of his coming?" In his name—that is, building on his name—false teachers will deny almost every thing which the Scripture teaches. His Godhead, his real humanity, the significance of his incarnation, his cross, and his resurrection. Events similar to those predicted as being signs of his coming, and having some resemblance to them, will be pointed out as embodying all the fulfillment we need expect. So plausible will it all be, that those who are not on their guard will be deceived.

2.—A caution.—Jesus did not tell them the exact time of the destruction of the Temple; so neither would he tell them the exact time of his coming. They were not to be deceived by appearances. The end was not yet, though when it would be he did not tell them. He even told them that he had voluntarily limited and kept back from his own knowledge the time. It was hidden among the unrevealed secrets of the Father. (Acts i, 8; Matt. xxiv, 36.) His appearing was certain as a matter of fact, but uncertain, so far as our knowledge is concerned, as to the time. At all events, "the Gospel must be preached among all nations" before his second coming and the end of the world. That fulfillment has seemed to be perfected for many ages past, and yet all the time new nations and tribes are being discovered and visited. The Church has been looking for this consummation and counting on it since the days of the Apostles, who supposed that even then the Gospel had been preached to every nation under heaven. But then the world kept growing larger; while in our day it is daily

growing smaller. We have nearly explored its limits, and still we are not finished in our work of world-testimony.

3.—The signs of his coming.—These were many, but they must be carefully studied, and hasty conclusions must not be formed. First, there must be *wars*. There have been many of these, and yet the final conflict of nations has not come; the universal rising of nation against nation to hurl themselves against each other, has not yet taken place, though several times in the history of the world since then, it has seemed as though that period had arrived. It will yet come. *Earthquakes*. There have been earthquakes, some of them appalling in their magnitude, and yet the grand and awful catastrophe which will take place, has not yet shaken this world to its foundations, though even now the smoldering fires may be gathering beneath to precipitate that tragedy upon the inhabitants of the world. *Famines*. There have been famines that have swept away millions, and yet the great and final starvation has not come. *Troubles*. Social disorders, political complications have been in the world since then, and are even now rife among the people and in cabinets. These are all portents, but not complete fulfillments. *Persecutions*. There have been awful persecutions; almost, if not entirely, every detail of the prophesied persecutions has been realized by God's faithful servants; yet the era of frightful persecution, which will yet break upon the people of God, under the reign of the great Antichrist, has not begun, though there are not wanting signs of its approach. The long lull in the world's opposition to the Church is ominous. The Church is sleeping in the delusion that the world, the flesh, and the devil have become reconciled to Christ and his Gospel. Is it not rather that the Church has accepted the world's patronage and fallen away from the high place of separation and testimony, having bought peace or taken a bribe, and fallen asleep under the power of her arch enemy? Is there not danger that Christ will come and find a part, at least, of his Church asleep?

4.—Instructions.—He tells them how to act under certain circumstances. They were to be prepared for any thing that might happen. In all emergencies, they were to be trustful, knowing that in whatever befell them God had a mission for them. They were to bear their testimony. They were not to be anxious as to what they should say when they were suddenly confronted by their persecutors. God would be with them and teach them in that moment what to say. We ought not to disregard all this, for though these things are not happening to the professing Church, yet in effect they are happening to those who live godly in Christ Jesus. There are places in the world

where our brethren are thus called upon; and in the measure in which we are faithful and true, we will be met by similar emergencies. During the interregnum of time, before the open appearance of Jesus in his glory, all these things will occur. We are to be prepared for them, whether they come in lesser or greater degree of intensity.

5.—Encouragement.—Our Lord closes this part of his discourse (vs. 13) with this word of encouragement: "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." It may be given to us, or it may not, to bear witness for Christ at the cost of suffering and privation; but if so we are to be faithful to his instructions, patient in our endurance, and hopeful of the end, never losing confidence in the word of him who has promised to save us out of all our afflictions and trials, and in the end bring us to his kingdom. In view of all these things, and the certainty of our Lord's second coming, let us take the lessons of this great discourse to heart, and learn to lay hold on the spiritual substance of our inheritance rather than the temporary symbol of it. Let us set our affections on things above; let us be watchful, not with a careless and dreamy or even enthusiastic fanaticism concerning the time of his coming, but by keeping our thought toward him while we faithfully do his work; let us be patient and yet expectant; let us be "steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord," and always confident that he who shall come will come, and will not tarry, and will fulfill all things according to his word. The fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the Temple is the guarantee of the fulfillment of the larger prophecy concerning the end of the world. As the faithful ones in Jerusalem escaped from the desolations, so shall we out of the great tribulation which shall come upon the whole earth.

LESSON XVIII.

THE COMMAND TO WATCH.—Mark xiii, 24-37.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Take ye heed, watch and pray : for ye know not when the time is.—Mark xiii, 33.

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. Now learn a parable of the fig tree : When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near : so ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass away : but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray : for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore : for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning : lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.—Mark xiii, 24-37.

This lesson, as well as the last, should be carefully studied in connection with the corresponding records in Matt. xxiv, xxv, and Luke xxi. Matthew gives the fullest account of our Lord's great prophetic discourse, and in it, rather than in Mark or Luke, do we find the key to its interpretation and the data by means of which we are enabled to rightly divide the teaching as it refers to the several classes of persons who are most deeply interested in it. The immediate and primary reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the tribulation attending that awful period is soon lost sight of in the greater and more appalling events which it symbolizes. From the destruction of the Temple and the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans, the Master proceeds to the consideration of the greater events that will usher in the end of the world. (Matt. xxiv, 3.) It is not to be supposed, for a moment, that the destruction of Jerusalem, dreadful as that event was and frightful as were the circumstances attending it, fill up the lines of

this wonderful prophecy. We must look ahead to that more dreadful time spoken of by Daniel, the prophet, and elaborated by St. John in the Apocalypse.

Two methods of treating this lesson are open to us. First, we may attempt a minute and careful exposition of the whole prophecy, and point out its several scenes and parts in the order of their prophetic fulfillment. This would involve an amount of study and the examination and comparison of so much Scripture and the criticism of so many conflicting theories of interpretation, that we should become hopelessly lost in a maze. Second, we may indicate the general drift of the prophetic teaching, and leave our readers to pursue the study of detail according to the best light and help they may be able to find. It is wise to frankly admit that the satisfactory unraveling of this prophecy is attended with many difficulties. Our Lord's second coming and the end of the world, while they are often spoken of in the Scripture as one event, as "the day of the Lord," "that great and notable day," etc., constitute, in fact, one great double event in which there are many minor and contributing happenings. If the whole were dramatized (as, in a sense, it is by the prophets), it would be seen to comprise, in the course of its development, many separate acts and scenes. For the benefit of those who particularly wish to study the subject I introduce, by way of suggestion, the following condensed exposition of the entire prophecy, using the xxiv and xxv of Matthew as the basis. Let it be remembered, that the three great classes with which all prophecy has to do are the Jews, Gentiles, and the Church of Christ. The coming of the Lord has relation to each of these, and his manifestation to each differs from that to the other. Christ's coming in the air, to call his Church out of the world, is the first act in the great *denouement* of this age. (I. Thess. iv.) His coming in the clouds visibly to the Jews, who shall see him and at once be converted (Rev. ii, 7), is the second act in connection with this last period of the world's history. Synchronous with this second visible appearing is that described in II. Thess. i, where he is seen appearing in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God. These are phases of the second coming which show us how that event is related differently to the Church, to the Jews, and to the wicked among the Gentile nations. The leading outlines of our Lord's great discourse are as follows:

Matt. xxiv, 1-44, is the Lord's coming in relation to the *Jews*; xxiv, 45; xxv, 1-30, is the Lord's coming in relation to the professing *Church*; xxv, 31-46 is the Lord's coming in relation to the *Gentiles*, or nations. Chapter xxiv, 15, notes a most important point, due atten-

tion to which is needful for the understanding of the prophetic future. If compared with Daniel xii, 11, its future reference is clear. It marks, too, with distinctness, the awful time of Jacob's trouble. (Jer. xxx, 7.) Verses 16-28 describe the terrible state of things in Palestine during the last half of Daniel's week of seven years. (Dan. xii, 1-11.) Verses 29-44, the events which follow the close of the tribulation—the personal coming of the Son of Man in glory. These passages placed against the corresponding ones in Mark's Gospel will be of help in interpreting or, rather, understanding this prophecy. The parable of the man who took a journey into a far country and returned, with which our lesson closes, is intended to illustrate or show the connection between service, waiting for our Lord's coming, and practical condition of heart. This parable should be studied in connection with the three parables (Matt. xxiv, 43; xxv, 1-30), viz.: the goodman of the house, the coming of the bridegroom, and the talents. This *résumé* will be of help to those who are purposing or pursuing a thorough study of our Lord's great prophecy.

I.—THE GENERAL STATEMENT.

1.—**Those days.**—The period referred to in the first verse of our lesson covers the days yet to come, described in Dan. i, 1-11, and Zeph. i, 15-17, after the Jews shall have returned in unbelief to their land, and been deceived and corrupted by the great Antichrist. The whole passage, down to verse 34, is clearly a Jewish prophecy, and will come to pass just before the ushering in of the millennium by the appearance of Christ in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (In the meantime, the Church will have been removed from the earth by being caught up to meet the Lord in the air; I. Thess. iv.) The Advent of Christ in open glory will be preceded by some astonishing signs. (a) *Extraordinary material phenomena.* "The sun darkened; the moon shall not give her light; and the stars of heaven shall fall; and the powers that are in the heaven shall be shaken." There have been presages of this coming catastrophe in the heavens for many ages. Recent observations by astronomers all go to confirm the fact that the most momentous changes are now going on in the physical heavens, which portend terrific changes in which the earth itself can not escape. (b) *The Son of Man coming in the clouds "with power and great glory."* This will be his answer to the awful crime of the Jews who crucified him, and in exact fulfillment of his words spoken to the priests and elders at the time of his arrest and trial by them, when they determined to put him to death. (Matt. xxvi, 64.) This

appearance of the rejected Messiah will at once overwhelm them, and lead to their conversion. They will then see what their awful mistake has been, both in rejecting the true Messiah, whom they crucified, and in being deceived by the Antichrist, who wrought the abomination of desolation in the Temple after receiving their allegiance and promising them protection. (c) *The sending forth of his angels.* They shall gather his elect from the four winds; "from the uttermost parts of the earth, to the uttermost parts of the heaven." This is an expression which conveys to us the thoroughness with which all the scattered people of God shall be gathered together. What the power of the angels is or how exercised, we can not now know, nor is it necessary that we should.

2. The parable of the fig-tree.—This was intended to suggest to them the importance of observing, and the certainty of, the prognostication of the signs. The summer is known to be nigh when the fig-tree begins to swell at the bud and put forth leaves. So when these things, of which he has been telling them, begin to come to pass, they may know that the great day of the Lord is at hand.

3.—Assurances.—Our Lord gave the disciples two assurances in connection with this prophecy. (a) "*This generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.*" If the word generation refers to the then living people, the fulfillment of the things spoken of might well be applied to Jerusalem and its impending destruction by the Romans, as it came within the lifetime of the generation then living; but if generation (*genea*) refers to the Jewish race, which, in my judgment, it does, then the miraculous preservation of the Jews through all the long ages which are past since this prophecy was spoken, is the most remarkable sign and proof of the truth of the prophecy. No doubt it is to be understood in both senses. The preliminary or symbolic fulfillment of the great prophecy was during the then living generation, while the actual and greater fulfillment of prophecy was constantly testified to by the marvelous preservation of the Jewish race. (b) "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass.*" Nothing should disturb the confidence with which the believer awaits the fulfillment of Christ's words. They are surer than the solid earth and the immovable heavens.

4.—Warning and exhortation.—No doubt this part of the prophecy refers to Jewish matters, and was given for the guidance and instruction of the remnant of believers among the Jews. The time could not be calculated as to the day or hour, or as to the year, for that matter, because the period of time between then and the Lord's coming for his Church was not known, even by the angels or

the Son of Man himself, who chose to limit his own knowledge upon this point. At the same time the exhortation to them was to "take heed to watch and pray, for they knew not when the time is."

II.—THE MAN TAKING A FAR JOURNEY.

Our Lord now adds a closing parable. This parable may well take the place of the three parables uttered by our Lord, and recorded in Matthew's Gospel. The references to the coming of Christ in relation to the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church, blend in these discourses, so that it is not always easy rightly to divide them. For all practical purposes, we may well conclude that the parable here, as in Matthew's Gospel, bears particularly on the relation of Christ's coming to the Church. Or it may be taken to cover the entire case, as it affects each of the three classes. The last word in the lesson would suggest that the parable was intended to be of universal application. "What I say unto you, I say unto all : Watch." We, who are now living, may well take it to heart, and be instructed as to what our attitude and state of mind should be in respect to that event, so certain to come to pass, and yet so uncertain as to the time.

1.—**The Son of Man taking a journey.**—This, of course, points to our Lord's absence from the earth at this time. We know, from other Scriptures, for what he has gone, and where. He has gone to prepare mansions for us in heaven, and to get his kingdom, that, clothed with full power and authority, he may claim, without dispute, that which is his, but from which he was cast out when here as the meek and lowly Jesus.

2.—**The house which he left behind him.**—By this expression, we know is meant his interests in the world : The prosecution of the Gospel commission, the care of his Church, and the general interests for which he stands, and of which he is the center. Thus, we are, for him, the light of the world, the salt of the earth, his torch-bearers and witnesses. All of that work of winning men back to God, and edifying them in the divine life which he would have personally done in connection with his disciples, had he remained on the earth, we must do in his absence.

3.—**His commission to his servants.**—Before our Lord left the world, he called his disciples, and commissioned them to preach and make disciples. He gave them authority, and charged them to be diligent. The parables in Matthew's Gospel bring all this out most clearly. We are not to understand that there are classes among his disciples who are distinguished, some as stewards, some as common

laborers, and some as porters. Rather are we to think of these designations as defining the various ways in which we are related to him. First, we are all servants. Second, we are all men, charged with the duty of service. Third, we are straightly commanded to be on the lookout for his return. As servants or stewards of the manifold grace of God, he has given us authority to do his business in his name. As men, he has given to each one of us our work. He knows no idlers among his people. There is no class of Christians who are not bound, by their very relation to Christ, to be counted among the workers. All have not the same work, but each has his work to do. It must be ours to learn from him what our work is, and do it. If any have named the name of Christ, and yet have found no place or time in which to serve him, or are idly indifferent to his work, they are mere pretenders, and not true disciples. As porters, he has indicated that we servants, while attending to the work in hand, must, like a faithful porter, be on the lookout for his return, prepared for and expecting his coming, and ready to warn others, as we see "the day approaching." This we should each strive to be: Servants, laborers, and porters.

4.—**His return.**—The master of the house has not gone away permanently, but will surely return. He has left no word for us to come to him, but to abide faithfully in our calling, awaiting his return.

(a) *That return will be certain.* "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." "Unto them who look for him he shall come a second time without sin unto salvation." Let us not join with the scoffers who say: "Where is the promise of his coming?" Nor with the wicked and slothful servant who said: "My Lord delayeth his coming," but rather with those who are "looking for and hastening the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

(b) *It is uncertain as to time.* We know not the day nor the hour. It may be in the evening, at midnight, at cock-crowing, or in the morning. There has never been a time in all these years when his coming was not imminent. It is to be the next great event to the believer in this world, and the next event to the unbelieving world, which shall mark an entire change in the order of things. The coming of the Lord in open revelation to the Jews in power and great glory is, no doubt, distant, because it is to be preceded by certain events which have not yet come to pass; but his coming for the Church is as imminent as a sudden thunder-squall out of a clear sky. (I. Thess. iv, 15-18; I. Cor. xv, 52.) Let us, who are believers and a part of his Church, be ready for it. We should take the place of the wise virgins, who have gone out to meet him with lamps trimmed and burning, ready at the first cry to rise up and meet him.

(c) *It will be sudden.* With all our watchfulness, his coming will be sudden—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. But it will not matter, except that it will surprise us with a sudden and great gladness, if we are watchful and faithful disciples. Nothing could be more dreadful than to have him come and find us not only sleeping, but with an empty oil vessel, the lamp of our profession burned out, and shut out from the marriage supper of the Lamb, as it is to be feared some will be. Alas!

(d) *His coming will be in a period of darkness.* It is noteworthy that he does not speak of the possibility of his coming at midday, but between evening and morning. This may point to a time of darkness in which the Church will be steeped, when the love of many shall have waxed cold, when faith shall have practically ceased, and the Church shall have generally lapsed into a worldly state, like that of the Laodiceans; a night-time of unbelief and careless, worldly living. Let us be warned by this, live and walk in the light, that we be not overtaken in spiritual darkness.

LESSON XIX.

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY.—Mark xiv, 1-9.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*She hath done what she could.*—Mark xiv, 8.

After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread : and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people. And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious ; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone ; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good : but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could : she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.—Mark xiv, 1-9.

The transition from the brow of Olivet, where Jesus had been sitting with his disciples, discoursing to them of the solemn wonders and awful tribulation he foretold in connection with his second coming and the immediate doom of Jerusalem to a friendly, domestic circle, in the quiet little village of Bethany, where he received the humble but beautiful homage of a gentle and grateful woman, would be violent and unnatural in any other but Jesus. He knew his coming death, now less than a week off, and yet he was calm, gentle, and patient, having leisure to respond to social calls and kindly offices done to him. This was the "peace of God that passeth understanding," and kept his heart from anxiety and his mind from perturbation. It would be so with us in all things if our hearts were "stayed on him" as his heart was stayed on God, his Father. (Is. xxvi, 3.) The time of the anointing of which our lesson treats was early in the week in which he was crucified, possibly on Tuesday before "Good Friday." The place was at Bethany, and in the house of Simon the leper. In order to get all the details of this beautiful story, the parallel passages in Matt. xxvi and John xii should be consulted. We do not know who this Simon was. Many conjectures have been advanced, none of them entirely

satisfactory, but any of them possible. Simon was a very common name. This Simon was designated by the term, "the leper." It may be that he was one of the lepers whom Jesus had healed, and that the supper spoken of in this lesson was a token of gratitude on his part, as Levi had similarly tendered him a feast. It has been conjectured that he was a near kinsman, or at least an intimate friend, of the Lazarus family; some even have supposed that he was the husband of Martha. There are circumstances which might imply that the feast was in the house of the Bethany sisters, since we are told that Lazarus was at the table and Martha served, and it was Mary who anointed the Lord. We are indebted to John for a knowledge of these particulars, for neither Matthew nor Mark mentions the name of the "woman" who broke the box of ointment on the Saviour's head. What an interesting company it was! There was Simon, whom the Lord had healed of leprosy; Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead, sitting, no doubt, grave and silent, as well he might after his late wonderful experience; there was Martha, as usual, busy with serving, and Mary, the contemplative woman, who had chosen the better part, and whose whole soul was filled with an adoring love for Christ. The disciples were there also; and we may infer that at the supper were not a few Jews from Jerusalem, drawn by curiosity to see Lazarus and, doubtless, invited by Simon with a desire that they also might see and believe.

I.—MARY'S LOVING ACT.

We may fancy the company reclining at table. Simon, glad and happy to have Jesus seated at his board; Lazarus, as we have said, grave and reverent, carrying, as he did, in his consciousness the experiences of two worlds; Martha, busy serving the table and seeing that all were well supplied with food; the invited guests, together with the disciples, listening to the discourse which must have been going on. Possibly Jesus was telling them of his approaching death and preparing their minds, as we know he was constantly doing, for the solemn events about to occur. To all this Mary sat and listened with rapt attention. Her more subtle and spiritual mind had caught the import of Jesus' words, and she realized that this, perhaps, was the last time she would see him or have opportunity to testify her adoring love. Whether she had brought the precious box of perfume with her, or whether, obeying a sudden impulse to pour it upon the Saviour's head, she hastily rose from the company and went and fetched it, does not appear. In either case, it is easy for us to gather, from the simple and beautiful story, the main features of her loving act.

1.—It was a spontaneous act of adoring love.—She had consulted no one about it. Whether she had contemplated the act before or whether it was a sudden impulse (which seems most probable), it was spontaneous, and, as we have said, may have been coupled with the thought that this was her last opportunity to testify her love. She had before sat at his feet and drunk in his words of love and life; now she will stand over him and pour out the wealth of her love in this beautiful tribute. This act of Mary's suggests what more of us would do if we, as Mary, contemplated Christ and sat oftener at his feet, choosing the better part of life, which he came to teach and impart. We lack, also, in our worship of Jesus and in our service this element of free spontaneity. We both worship and serve with too much cold calculation, and too much by rule and rote. We, again, fail to appreciate the value of a present and possibly a last opportunity of testifying our love to Christ. If we thought we should have no opportunity beyond that offered us to-day, how eagerly we would embrace it; and we are everywhere taught to consider such as possibly the case, "While it is called to-day." To-morrow may not come to us, or the opportunity of to-day may not be kept waiting for us till to-morrow.

2.—It was an impulsive act.—This thought is involved in what we have already said, but it is worth considering more particularly. She stopped not to think or reason about what she was prompted to do; she counted not the cost or, at least, calculated it not. She stopped not to ask herself what others might think of her. Had she been less impulsive and more calculating, she probably would have not done this thing, which has become famous, being spoken of wherever the Gospel is preached. Many of our heaven-born impulses are smothered by too much cautious reflection, too much weighing in the scale of custom and examining in the light of conventional judgment. Many of us grieve the Spirit by not promptly obeying impulses which he starts in our hearts. I know it is said that impulsive persons are not safe guides or leaders. This may be true; but all are not called upon to lead. Some are chosen to follow, and serve in a loving and impulsive way. Certainly, Mary's spontaneous act contrasted favorably with the calculating conduct of her critics; nor did our Lord rebuke her by saying: "Mary, no doubt your impulse is kind, but you should be more careful, and not give way to your impulses in such an impetuous manner." I think we need a little, nay, much more, of the warm-hearted impulsiveness of Mary in our religion. If there were more of this there would be more kindness and fellowship among the disciples, more intercourse between rich and poor, more of that sweet charity which dies under the restraint of the world's conventionality.

3.—It was an extravagant act.—The perfume was costly. Three hundred pence it was estimated to be worth—about two hundred dollars in our money, considering the difference in the purchasing power of money then and now. She did not draw the stopple, or carefully lift the cover, and take out a few drops. She broke the vessel and poured out the contents in generous profusion. Nor did she stop with the anointing of his head; she anointed his feet also. So John tells us. This was an extravagance unknown; not even were kings so anointed. But to Mary, Christ's feet were as precious as his head. If his head were to bear the crown of thorns for her, his feet would be pierced for her. It was, in its way, an act to be placed beside the gift of the poor widow, who gave away her only two mites. Nothing was kept back; she gave him all she had. How different is all this from our careful and, generally, stingy offerings to our Lord. We do not say: "How much may I give or do?" but, rather: "With how little may I satisfy my conscience?" We think of ourselves, but Mary thought of her Lord.

4.—It was an imprudent act.—That is, from the point of view of the on-lookers. They would be sure to condemn it on every ground. Perhaps they would regard it as immodest. Certainly, it was not common for a woman to do such a thing. There is no precedent, except in the case of the fallen woman who anointed Christ's feet in the house of that other Simon. (Luke vii.) But why may not the pure-minded Mary, in the house of her friend, perhaps of her brother, do for the Master she loved what the other woman did? It is our insistent conformity to worldly propriety that has taken most of the beautiful and heavenly life out of our religion. We will do only what others do; and even Christians are kept under restraint by the customs of the people of the world.

II.—THE CRITICS.

We may be sure that whenever an unusual act of worship or consecration is performed by some impulsive disciple, there will be critics to condemn the action, even, nay, especially, among the disciples, many of whom are incapable of warm-hearted generosity. It is significant that Mary's critics were the disciples of Jesus. The criticism, according to John, began with Judas, who looked with covetous eyes upon that valuable ointment, and was angry that it had not come into his hands that he might embezzle it; for he was a thief, and was already contemplating the desertion, if not the betrayal of his Lord. Of course, he put his criticism on another ground, pretending that he was thinking of the poor. How many hypocrites make a pretense of

religion only to cover up their wickedness. The worst of it was, that he succeeded in corrupting the other disciples, for he set them all criticising and murmuring. And did not their criticism indirectly criminate Jesus? For was he not, by accepting the oblation of love, acquiescing in the waste, as they put it, and so defrauding the poor? And yet, when did those disciples ever care for the poor as he did? When they would have sent the poor away, he fed and healed them. They criticised Mary, as others do in similar cases, on false grounds.

1.—It was a waste.—No doubt there is much waste of good money by many disciples, but it is not often wasted on Jesus for love of him. As one of our good seventeenth century Puritan fathers has said: "Doubtless there are vast sums wasted on back, belly, and building for ourselves, but there can be no waste or extravagance in any such act as is here seen." There is such a thing as being too extravagant in the gratification of our own pleasures, appetites, and pride; but we can do none too much to testify our love to Jesus. There is waste often, but even God seems to spend on principles which selfish utilitarians would condemn. Of what use is the extravagance of beauty and perfume spent on flowers that bloom only in the desert; on plumage that graces the wings of birds which cut only the air of uninhabited regions, or that gleams on the scales of fish which never rise to the sight of man above the waters of the sea? God wastes for the delight of his own eyes and ours. We could live without flowers and things of beauty, but God has given them to us. God can get on with bare and necessary service; but he desires some of the extravagance of love bestowed on him who has emptied himself for us.

2.—It was unseemly, unwise, and out of place.—We are apt to criticise what does not originate with us. We may be sure that these fault-finding people would never have been guilty of such foolishness. When we think of the millions of dollars Christians spend for their own luxurious delight, and the meager gifts they make to and for the Lord; how they lavish their money on themselves, and how they calculate their gifts, and ask, "Cui bono," whenever anything is solicited of them for the service of God; we are inclined to say with another: "It requires neither talent nor piety to be a critic."

III.—JESUS' DEFENSE OF MARY.

While they were murmuring and complaining, Jesus was rejoicing in Mary's glad and lovely act. He also read the hearts of his disciples, who had allowed themselves to be drawn into an unworthy state of

mind by listening to the fault-finding of the traitor. He turns to them, and at once defends, justifies, commends, and accepts the beautiful devotion of Mary.

1.—Let her alone.—He first defends her from their unkind murmurings. Their eyes were glaring upon her, and, possibly, she was embarrassed by their looks and whisperings; so he says sharply to them: "Let her alone! Stop looking at her in that unkind and sinister way! Why trouble or vex ye her? What is it to you that she has taken what was her own and bestowed it on me?"

2.—"She hath wrought a good work."—"You are saying it is foolish and wasteful; but I say it is a good work." He proceeds to indicate wherein it was good. It was good as tested by her motive: in it she showed her love, gratitude, and devotion. It was good in manner: warm-hearted, enthusiastic, impulsive, and admirably extravagant. It was good in its very freedom and unconventionality. Let us be reminded again that there is too little warm-hearted, impulsive service for Christ; too few new methods devised in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit; too much conformity to custom; too much selfishness and commercial calculation in connection with the service of God.

3.—She hath done what she could.—It is not hers to go about the country preaching and testifying; yet she has a part in my service. She is but a woman, with a box of perfume, but this she gladly gives to me. It is a gift according to her ability and opportunity. This is much to say. "She hath done what she could." It was more than the disciples did, a little later, when they all forsook him and fled. Let us do what we can, and be sure it will not fail of our Lord's loving acceptance.

4.—It had a prophetic value.—We do not know how far Mary was conscious of what she was doing, but Jesus said: "She has come beforehand to anoint my body for the burying." We may mean only love in doing some things; but whatever is done in love, will be sure to be adjusted to some high and glorious end. Jesus says: "This is for my burying. I accept it, and place it where I will, and it shall be a sweet and necessary service to me."

5.—It was an act done to him entirely independent of other uses.—Religion is worship as well as service. Jesus is present to us as well as his work. We have not exhausted our love to our loved ones when we have provided them with what they need. We give them gifts that are without practical usefulness only because we love them, and wish to let them know it. We Christians do much work for ourselves, for our Church, for the poor, even; but we do little for

Christ. He is too little the object of our personal love. Mary, no doubt, was interested in the poor, and would willingly have done them a service; but just now she loved Christ more than the poor, or even "his cause," and her whole heart went out to him for himself alone. A little more of this element of personal love to Jesus would wonderfully brighten and beautify our religious life.

IV.—AS TO THE POOR.

The disciples put the poor before Christ; but he is of more worth than the poor. Indeed, it is only because of him that the poor are considered at all. The more we love him, the more certainly will the poor be considered and cared for by us. So he said to them: "The poor ye have with you always; and whensoever ye will, ye may do them good." Many persons seem anxious for the poor, and are willing that other persons' ointment should be sold, and the proceeds given to them. But if they are so much concerned for them, let them give to them of their own. There shall never lack an opportunity of helping the poor whenever there is a will to do it. This is true of all good works. Only let us first do what we can, as unto him, out of the means which we have ourselves, before we complain of other people not doing what they ought, especially according to our views. Let us be as generous with our own as we are willing to be with the possessions of others. It is a very common thing to hear even very good people discourse on what the duty of other people is in respect to their means and the object of their beneficence. No doubt there is much misapplied money in the world, but whenever there is a desire on the part of any one to do even what may seem to us a foolish and extravagant thing, because of a desire to pour out affection on the Lord, let us not mar the act by trying to force the gift through some utilitarian channel of our own digging, and especially let us be sure that our criticism is not a sinister one.

This beautiful act of Mary's, criticised by the disciples, accepted by Jesus, has filled eighteen centuries with its fragrance, and made personal devotion to Christ more sweet and beautiful. Have we ever broken a box of perfume upon his head and feet from love of him?

LESSON XX.

THE LORD'S SUPPER.—Mark xiv, 12-26.

GOLDEN TEXT.—This do in remembrance of me.—Luke xxii, 19.

And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him, one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born. And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.—Mark xiv, 12-23.

In our last study we were struck with the contrast between the solemn prophetic discourse with his disciples concerning the end of the world and the quiet household scene in which a gentle woman anointed his head with costly perfume. Here we have another contrast. Judas, stung to madness and disappointment by the "waste" of the ointment and by the rebuke of the Master, went away at once, to get the most he could for himself by selling his Lord to his enemies for a paltry "thirty pieces of silver." This proposition of Judas, so unexpected and sudden, disturbed the plan of the rulers to not molest Jesus until after the feast, and hurried them forward in their awful work. While this conspiracy was going forward in hurry and confusion, Jesus, according to his well-known and joyfully-accepted destiny, quietly and lovingly goes forward in preparation for the last interview with his

disciples, thinking all the time of them rather than himself. If he was now about to meet death, he would first open up to them the mysteries of it, and show them how it was for them he should die, and that his death was to be for their life. The disciples knew nothing of the proposed supper, as it lay in the mind of Jesus. They thought only of the passover feast, which they had probably celebrated with him twice before. The time for that feast was again upon them, and they asked the question: "Where wilt thou that we go and prepare, that thou mayest eat the passover?" They little thought of what a blessed feast he had in mind for them; as much higher and better than the ancient passover feast as he was higher and better than all the passover lambs which had ever been slain for them; as his salvation is higher and better than the temporal deliverance wrought for their fathers on the night of their exodus from Egypt; as heaven is higher than earth.

I.—PREPARATIONS FOR THE FEAST.

Jesus was not disconcerted that Judas had gone out to betray him; or that, having made his bargain with the rulers, he had come back among the disciples as though he was still of them. He was not inclined to take advantage of his knowledge of the treachery of Judas to escape from the vicinity of Jerusalem. He knew that his hour had come, and, obedient to the purpose for which he came into the world, the Son of Man went forward to his doom as it was written of him. We are deeply interested in every detail of this quiet and blessed preparation.

1.—**It must be in Jerusalem.**—Here only must the passover be eaten. He will not swerve from the law or the custom to avoid the danger threatened him by his determined enemies. It was never any thing to Jesus that he hazarded his life for his disciples. He was the Good Shepherd, ever ready to give his life for his sheep. He will go into the lion's den or the fiery furnace, if these lie in his way. In giving directions for the feast he does not specify any particular house, though, doubtless, he well knew where it was. Perhaps he sends the two disciples off alone to find the house, and bring him and the rest of the disciples word, to prevent Judas from prematurely betraying him, by secretly, or even openly, going to the rulers and giving them information that would lead to his arrest before he was ready to deliver himself up into their hands. He gives the disciples a sign, as he did when he sent them into the city a few days before, to fetch him the ass's colt on which he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. A man with a pitcher of water was to guide them to the good man whose

chamber he was about to use. These directions may have seemed to them rather vague and uncertain, but they had now learned to trust their Lord without much question, and were ready and prompt to do as he bade them. Nor were they mistaken or confounded in their faith, for "they found as he had said unto them." What a comfort it is to our faith, that if we obey Christ with unquestioning alacrity, we shall surely find as he has said to us. We need no other assurance than his word. "Go thy way, thy son liveth," said he to the poor man who came about his sick child; "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole," he said to the woman with an issue of blood; "Go thy way; show thyself to the priest," he said to the leper whom he had pronounced clean. These all went as Jesus bade them, and found it even as he had said. "Go thy way and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and come follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven," he said to the rich young ruler; but he went away sorrowful and did not as Jesus had commanded, and he missed of eternal life. The disciples, in our lesson, obeyed in this matter, and found it as Jesus said; so shall we find that all things work together for good to them that obey him; for his covenant with us is ordered in all things and sure.

2.—The goodman of the house.—We know not who this man was. It was customary for the inhabitants of Jerusalem to let out their guest-chambers to those coming from the country, in which they might celebrate the passover with their families. This goodman was probably one whom Jesus knew to be his friend and disciple, though he was evidently unknown to the disciples who sought him according to the sign given. The message to him was: "The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I may eat the passover with my disciples?" This was enough for him. The upper chamber was immediately placed at his disposal. The Lord has disciples and friends that we know not of, who are ready to give to him when he asks, even to put the best they have at his disposal. How happy that man was to have a room to give to Jesus; what a sanctification that room had; a consecration more sacred than had ever come to the Temple itself. To what better purpose can we put any thing we possess than to yield it up for the Master's use? What greater joy than to have him take and use any thing we have? To many now he is standing and knocking for entrance into the chamber of their hearts, desiring to sup with them in a way even more blessed than when he ate with these disciples.

3.—The coming of the twelve.—Every thing having been made ready, "in the evening he cometh with the twelve." Whether the dis-

ciples returned to Bethany and reported the successful issue of their visit to the city, or whether Jesus followed with the ten disciples and met them in the appointed place, is not clear. It does not matter. Judas was with them. He had had no opportunity to betray the place of meeting; he would go with them and wait for a more convenient season. It came to him, alas, with such a warning and woe upon him as never before fell on any mortal soul. There, with the little company, Jesus sat and ate the passover, and discoursed to them. John tells us (xiii) that between eating the passover and instituting the Lord's Supper, he opened to them the agony of his heart in respect to the coming treason; arose and washed their feet; taught them humility, and prophesied to them of his great saving work. It was a memorable evening. It was not till after the traitor had left the company that he delivered the sweet and heavenly discourse recorded in John xiv, xv, xvi, and made the great high-priestly prayer of chapter xvii. The thirteenth chapter of John should be read in connection with this lesson.

II.—THE SOP.

As they sat together at the passover, our Lord's soul began to be agonized, not at the thought of his approaching death, but because one of his own disciples was meditating, and had, in a measure, accomplished a dastardly treason against him. This so filled his heart that he broke forth with that surprising cry: "One of you which eateth with me shall betray me." Our Lord's outward and physical sufferings on the cross are usually dwelt upon more than the inward torture of his soul. No part of his suffering was more intense than that which came upon him through the faithlessness of his disciples. Perhaps he suffered nothing from them all which was so keen as this. Partly perhaps because he saw in it not only his own betrayal, in which the base ingratitude and awful wickedness of Judas' heart was disclosed, but because he saw, also, the certain and eternal loss of that miserable man's soul; and that in spite of all his desire to save him.

1.—The disclosure.—"One of you shall betray me." This was a sudden and awful revelation. Perhaps it struck a cold chill into Judas' heart for a moment. Until now he had thought that his fiendish work was secret from Jesus. Now he knows that some one is suspected of treason. Perhaps it was not he; yet he must have trembled with fear. There is infinite pathos and woe in this declaration of Christ. That the rulers should desire his death was not so bitter a thought; that the common people, for whom he was so tenderly solicitous, should be carried away by their leaders into crying out for his

crucifixion was yet bearable, because he may have seen their ignorance; but that one of his own familiar band should lift up his heel against him, was bitter, indeed. Peter, in a moment of weakness, would deny him, but in his heart he was not untrue; the rest would forsake him and flee in an hour of great danger, but they would rally; but here was one who had deliberately, wickedly, and with a heart dead to every movement of love and gratitude, plotted his betrayal, and was then, even while eating bread and drinking wine with him, cogitating how he might accomplish it. This awful secret was unveiled to his disciples by the overflow of the Master's grief. And yet how tender! He did not at once point out the traitor. It is as though with the disclosure he would utter a cry of entreaty and warning to Judas, that he might even yet retreat. Not until the last effort of divine love has been exhausted will Jesus give up a soul. Still, we have this lesson, that the secret wickedness of men's hearts is open to him, and will, if not abandoned, be exposed and brought to light.

2.—Heart-searching.—This declaration of Jesus, with, perhaps, a look of bitter sorrow on his face and agony in his voice, was an awful shock to the disciples. Could such a thing be possible? And as he did not specify who, but only said, "One of you," could it be possible that it was either of them? Whom could he mean? Perhaps the most timid and self-distrustful among them began heart-searching first, and at last, in an agony, put the question to the Lord: "Is it I? Is it possible that so base a deed can come from my heart?" Then the others followed with the same question; until all had asked it but Judas. Another evangelist tells us that he brazened it out, knowing that his silence would draw suspicion to him, and said also: "Is it I?" Thus adding cold-blooded hypocrisy to his black-hearted treason. His heart was dead. What matter now what he said or did? He lost his opportunity to retreat by confession, and sealed his doom by hypocrisy.

3.—The traitor pointed out, and his doom pronounced.—In answer to their agonized questions, Jesus, when he saw that Judas would persist, indicated, either to them all, or to a few who were reclining nearest him, that it was the one to whom he would give a sop, and who would dip it in the dish with him. Even now he will not openly disclose the name; he will be gentle with Judas to the last. John tells us that, after Judas had dipped his sop, Jesus whispered in his ear to do quickly what he was about to do. Satan now entered into Judas' heart, and the case was past redemption. Then, with solemn words, Jesus pronounced the woe. His treason will be successful, but there will be no overthrow of his work, for all this was fore-

seen, and would be utilized; but woe to the man who had thus deliberately sold and betrayed his Lord. "It were better for him that he had never been born." This is the absolute doom of the soul. It is the shutting of the door upon his eternal damnation. How dreadful it was, only the imagination can appreciate. It is not possible to put more into words than is comprehended in this awful sentence.

IV.—THE SUPPER.

We are told by another evangelist that, as soon as Jesus had spoken to him, Judas "went immediately out; and it was night." (John xiii, 30.) What an awful night his soul went into when he, for the last time, left his betrayed Master's side. The traitor having gone, Jesus turned to his disciples, and, taking a piece of bread, gave it to them. Afterward, he took a cup of wine, and gave it to them in like manner. Of the one, he said: "This is my body"; and of the other: "This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for many." Thus was the Lord's Supper instituted. The depth of significance in this simple ordinance the centuries since have not afforded sufficient time to sound. It is the central ordinance of Christianity. We may gather up a few of the leading thoughts and teachings contained in it.

1.—The blessing of the bread and wine.—This was a thanksgiving. We are struck with this: that while Jesus was instituting an ordinance, which was a parable of his self-sacrifice, in which his body was to be broken as corn before it is baked into a loaf, and his blood was to be shed as wine bruised out of the living grape, he does so, not with complaint or mournful repining, but with thanksgiving. This is only paralleled by the fact that, when the Supper was over, they all sung a hymn, Jesus, no doubt, as the host, leading in the song. Rightly understood, this should make the celebration of the Lord's Supper an occasion for joy rather than morbid and painful self-examination, which tends to turn all thoughts upon and into self rather than toward the Lord and his blessed sacrifice, as the Supper was intended to help us do.

2.—The body and blood of Christ.—Jesus said: "This is my body; this is my blood." We need not waste time in the discussion of the question whether the bread and wine were changed in their substance, so that they became the real body and blood of Christ. The language is simple, and easily understood by any except those who desire to make it mean something that it does not. We understand these expressions, "my body" and "my blood," in the same sense

that we understand similar expressions in the parable of the tares; for instance: "The field *is* the world; the good seed *are* the children of the kingdom; but the tares *are* the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them *is* the devil; the harvest *is* the end of the world; and the reapers *are* the angels." (Matt. xiii, 38, 39.) The point to be insisted on is that which the broken bread and the poured wine signify; they point to our Lord's sacrificial death. As the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," he was first publicly introduced to the world; and as the great sin-offering he now shows himself to his disciples, and would concentrate their thoughts on that fact. His death is the culminating point of his ministry. "This is my blood shed for many." Matthew adds, "for the remission of sins." Our Lord left no other memorial to commemorate his teachings and mighty works but this, that should abide and be repeated in all time to show his death. It is by his death that our sins are put away; that we live; that we are brought back to God. Nothing can be more important than this. Only those who are determined to make the Gospel teach something else than what it does teach can fail to see the profound significance of this, our Lord's own commentary on his death: "He died the Just, for the unjust, to bring us to God." Of this we are reminded every time the supper is spread. "As oft as ye drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." From this we see that in his last hours, with the shadow of the cross lying darkly athwart his pathway, he would have us in all time reminded of his death. It is "Christ and him crucified;" not Christ and him teaching, or working miracles that made up the body of the apostolic teaching. Let us not even attempt to be wiser than they to whom Jesus expounded the meaning of his coming and death.

3.—"Take ye."—In this giving of his body and blood to his disciples, we have the beautiful reminder that he not only gave himself *for* us, but *to* us as well. There is not only redemption, but the loving proffer of it to us. The supper is not only spread, but we are bidden to the feast. "He, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself up to God, a sacrifice for sin." This was God's part. He now, and in this ordinance, offers himself to the sinner. *To* us. We are reminded of this every time the supper is spread.

4.—"Take, eat." "Drink ye all of it."—We add these words from Matthew's account, for though they are implied in our text, they are more fully set forth in Matthew's. From this we learn that it is not enough that he has died for us and freely offers himself to us, with all the benefits of the redemption accomplished by his death, but that in order to our redemption we must co-operate with him at least to

this extent; that we must appropriate him and his sacrificial death and make it ours, as we make bread and wine a part of ourselves by eating and drinking. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." His flesh and blood—that is, himself, as Son of man—offered up in sacrifice for us, is to our spiritual life what bread and drink are to our natural life. Without the latter taken, eaten, and drunken, our bodies would die; so without the assimilation of his body and blood our souls will die. The whole sixth chapter of John is the best commentary on this. It is most remarkable that in John's account Christ is set forth as the Son of man in this ordinance of eating and drinking rather than as the Son of God. In this we see that by assimilating his body and blood we are saved by the working in us of a new human life. God made himself man, that we might be restored to true manhood in Christ. We are not made Gods, but are redeemed men and women. He is the second Adam, though he be the Lord from heaven.

5.—Drinking the fruit of the vine new in the kingdom of God.—This is a somewhat difficult passage. What does it mean? I think it only points to a new, better, and completed fellowship when all things are made new. I associate it with all the new things spoken of in the word of God. The *new* covenant; the *new* heart; the *new* song; the *new* man; the *new* commandment; the *new* heavens and the *new* earth, and the *new* name given to his believing people. "Behold, I make all things *new*." In that *new* kingdom we shall all sit down and drink the wine *new* with him. How blessed is the thought and expectation of all this! The Lord's Supper is a foretaste and prophecy of that new kingdom and our part in it.

LESSON XXI.

JESUS BETRAYED.—Mark xiv, 43-54.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?—**Luke xii, 48.**

And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, Master; and kissed him. And they laid their hands on him, and took him. And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the Scriptures must be fulfilled. And they all forsook him, and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked. And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.—**Mark xiv, 42-54.**

Our Lord had once more told his disciples that he was about to die, and that preliminary to it they would all be scandalized because of him, knowing, as he did, how he was to be arrested and carried away as a common robber before the high priest; but that he would rise again and meet the fleeing and scattered sheep in Galilee. Heeding not what he said concerning his death and resurrection, Peter was indignant at the prophecy of their denial, and protested that, come what might, and be ashamed of him who might, he would never forsake him, even if his devotion cost him his life. This he vehemently protested again and again, and so did the rest of the disciples. How little they knew their own hearts! How little any of us know our own hearts! It becomes us to be heedful of professions and distrustful of our own strength, for we know not the trials that await us, nor the weakness that dwells in us. (vs. 25-31.) After this solemn warning, Jesus repaired with them to the garden of Gethsemane, and there fought out his last battle with himself in the midst of weakness and

temptation, with strong crying and tears. His disciples slept while their Lord was suffering the bitterest agony his heart had ever known up to this hour. The agony over, our Lord in tenderest mercy excuses the unfeeling and unfaithful indifference of his sleeping disciples, and again warns them that the time of his arrest is at hand. (vs. 31-43.)

The corresponding records of this event may be found in Matt. xxvi, 47-56; Luke xxii, 47-53; John viii, 1-12; and should be read in connection with the study of this account of Mark. It will be noted that Mark's account is the briefest and barest of them all, and yet it is most graphic and virile in statement. Many of the details are wanting here. Judas is dropped out of the story after the bare mention of his traitorous kiss and cold-hearted salutation; our Lord's sorrowful remonstrance and chiding of him is not mentioned; a simple allusion to the sword-stroke of Peter is mentioned, but not our Lord's reprimand; even his name is omitted, and that of the servant of the high priest; the account of the overthrow of the soldiers by his majestic glance upon them, and the saying of Jesus concerning their inability to take him against his will, and of the legions of angels that were at his command. Mark is intent only on contrasting the majestic calmness and gentleness of Jesus with the treachery of his false-hearted disciple and the brutal violence and cowardice of his enemies.

I.—THE BETRAYAL AND ARREST.

Immediately after his emergence from the Garden of Agony, he had discerned, either with his expectant eyes or divine insight, the coming of the traitor, in advance of the band of soldiers, and the accompanying mob, and led his disciples forth to meet his arrest. While he was yet speaking, Judas appeared, perhaps in the entrance gate of the Garden, and unaccompanied, that is, in advance of his guard of soldiers. It will be remembered that at the Supper he had been dismissed by Jesus. He had immediately gone to the high priests and indicated to them that the time was now arrived when Jesus could be taken. He had well judged the time, and he doubtless knew the place to which Jesus would retire with the eleven. It is almost with a shrinking and sickening of heart that we approach the details of this blackest chapter in human history.

1.—*The picture of a lost soul.*—"Judas one of the twelve." Here was a treason accomplished, not by a casual disciple, not by some offended half-partisan; not by some uninstructed distant follower who had had no opportunity to know the true character, sublime beauty,

innocence, and heavenly goodness of Jesus; but by one of his own intimate, familiar, and highly-favored Apostles. One who had been at his side for three years; who had daily listened to his words and seen the wonderful works of love and mercy which he had done. This man was now before him with the price of his treason in his pocket to carry out his infamous bargain. Jesus was now looking upon that to prevent which he had come from heaven to lay his life down in sacrifice : *a lost soul*. Judas had not yet tumbled down the awful way of despair and remorse into the pit, but his soul was filled with hell. Satan had entered into him, and after using him to deliver up the Son of man to be crucified, would hurl him down to "his own place." Thus does Satan reward them who serve him, and he usually buys their service cheap. Thirty pieces of silver was all Judas got for his treachery, and these tormented him so that, before he leaped into the abyss of darkness, he flung them from him with disgust and horror. Lost through love of money ! From covetousness he had followed Christ, hoping not to win heaven and help bring others there, but to win money. Lost in spite of divinest love ! Lost in spite of warnings repeated, tender and terrible ! Lost when he was so near to heaven ! Lost in the sight and presence of the King of Grace and Glory ! Lost with his feet on the threshold of the kingdom ! From the gate of glory he dropped headlong into the bottomless pit of hell ! What a frightful picture this is ! How it should warn us of the possibilities of sin and the awful danger of indulging and nursing the sin that so easily and naturally besets us, especially when we are in the presence of Christ. "Judas one of the twelve."

2.—The betrayal.—In a single graphic sentence we are told of the manner of the betrayal. It was not a sudden, impulsive fit of anger that led Judas to this frightful sin, but it had been long premeditated and carefully planned. It was deliberate, for he had gone to the priests and bargained about it, and now, when the time had come for him to carry out his bargain, he had carefully matured his plans, even to the arrangements of signs and signals. He had notified the captain of the guard that he would go in and advance and salute Jesus with a kiss, that by this token he might be distinguished from his disciples. His heart did not fail him; he was made strong by the spirit of the bottomless pit. His feet did not falter, his limbs did not fail to carry him forward, his voice was firm and clear, his lips did not quiver when he spoke, and laid them again and again on the cheek of the Son of God. The heart of the man was dead; he had the spirit of the fiend who now possessed it. His whole bearing and action was prompt, cold-blooded, and devilish. In Matthew's account of the Supper

we are told that the other disciples asked the fearful question concerning who should betray him thus: "Lord, is it I?" But Judas has ceased to regard him as Lord, and said: "Rabbi, is it I?" So here he simply addresses him with the words: "Master, Master." But he had already put Jesus out of his heart, and no longer regarded him as such. The account of the kissing is most terrible. The word used here is in the original, "much kissing." He went forward, and having saluted him, kissed him again and again, perhaps holding him as if in embrace. This much kissing was probably to deceive the disciples, and give time to the soldiers to come up and take him before his treachery was fully understood and the disciples interfere to defend him or Jesus escape. The whole transaction was fiendish to the last degree.

3.—The arrest.—"And they laid their hands on him and took him." What a sight was this! He who had come from heaven to take hold on our lost souls and deliver them out of the power of sin and out of the hands of Satan, was now himself laid hold of by the very powers of darkness and the hands of sinners, to be taken and slain. The Son of God in the hands of his enemies and led away to judgment and death, though he might have destroyed them with a word or called down devouring fire from heaven or smitten them with the twelve legions of angels whom he could have called from his Father by a word. How little sinners know what they do when they array themselves against the Son of man. Unthinking critics and dull unbelief may see nothing in all this but weakness and pusillanimity on the part of Jesus, when it was, in fact, the act of sublime sacrifice which he had come to accomplish for sinners. It was a part of the voluntary humiliation and self-emptying which lay in the pathway of heavenly obedience. "*They* laid their hands on *him* and took *him*." We can not but think of the way in which vain and daring men have in the ages since sought to lay hands on him. They have attempted to destroy and overthrow the power of his Gospel. They have stretched forth their hands and written books which they have vainly supposed would dispose of his claims and destroy his work. Again and again he has been led away by traitorous bands to be crucified; but as he arose again from the dead after his crucifixion, so again and again the Gospel has survived such feeble assaults of men.

4.—The single blow in his defense.—As soon as the situation was comprehended, one of the disciples (we know that it was Peter) impulsively drew his sword and aimed a blow at the head of the leader of the expedition. It fell short, and only smote off his ear. This was generous, but ill-advised and ill-timed. Peter had before remonstrated with Christ for even intimating that he must be delivered into the

hands of his enemies to be killed; now he remonstrates in a more effectual way. But he only got another rebuke for his unadvised zeal. It is remarkable that the first blow of violence in the controversy between Jesus and the world was struck by one of his disciples. But right there Jesus taught them that it is not so that his triumph is to be won. They would fight, but he would die. If they are to be like unto him, they must put up their swords and defend his cause by laying down their lives, if need be, in testimony. For themselves, they may defend their lives when they are attacked, even with the sword (Luke xxii, 37, 38), but for Christ and Christianity they may not fight. Our weapons in this warfare are not carnal but spiritual, and therefore more mighty.

II.—THE ARRESTING BAND.

The company who came out to arrest Jesus seems to have been a very mixed one. Soldiers, servants of the high priest, and a mixed multitude; the soldiers bearing swords, the mob carrying staves—that is, cudgels, clubs, and such extemporized weapons as they could find. The time chosen was to avoid a possible tumult and counter-movement from the people, which might be expected if it were delayed till daylight. The rulers had decided before that they would defer the whole matter till after the feast, but they had been hurried forward in spite of themselves, and must act now or not at all. The company were hastily gotten together after Judas had arranged with them for his betrayal. Doubtless they were in partial readiness the day before, waiting for the signal from the traitor. It was a deed of darkness, and was done at night. It was a deed of cowardice, and was done secretly. They were afraid, though Christ was not. They were confused, but he was calm. They were hurried, but he was deliberate and self-contained. The contrasts here are very great. A company of soldiers, backed by a mob, coming out to take the most peaceable and gentle man the world has ever seen; coming, with swords and staves, against one who had never lifted his hand but to bless and comfort the poor and the oppressed.

1.—**The servant of the high priest.**—We do not mention Judas in the following analysis of the crowd, as he has done his work, and is dropped from the narrative. This servant of the high priest was some trusted man, perhaps his secretary, or confidential adviser, sent out to superintend the whole business, and keep a watch on Judas, to see that, at the last moment, he did not turn traitor against the authorities. He therefore was the representative of the Sanhedrim, or council. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, were

back of the whole movement. In them we see the deliberate and malicious enmity of man going against Jesus, and seeking to overthrow him, from hatred of him and his kingdom. We have just such leaders among us to-day who, though they can not lay their hands on Jesus himself, seek in every way to destroy his cause. It is this class who enlist others against Christ; not content with their own infidelity, they array and use whomsoever they can to further their purpose of hate and wickedness against Christ.

2.—The soldiers.—These were, perhaps, a company of soldiers detailed by the Roman government to act as Temple police, and to preserve order during the feast days. Themselves not personally enlisted against Jesus, but under the order of others, and going where they are bidden. They may represent that vast company of people who are simply subject to the influence of others without stopping to consider for themselves. The world-bound souls, who do as they are bidden by the masters in business, society, politics, and religion. They have no opinions of their own, but do as they are told. A multitude voluntarily subject themselves to the dictation of strong infidel leaders. If their masters say Jesus is an impostor, they will echo the charge. If their masters say the Bible is a fiction, or a fraud, they will say, "Amen." If their masters tell them that Christianity is inconsistent with science, they say so, too. They do not know themselves, but are ready to do the bidding and reflect the opinions of others. Soldiers have no opinions of their own, they are simply under orders, unless they be volunteer soldiers, who have enlisted from motives of personal loyalty and love to the cause or master whom they serve.

3.—The mob.—This was a company of mercurial people, who were swayed by the popular and dominant beliefs about them. Perhaps some of these were among those who, a few days before, had followed Jesus to the Temple, shouting, "Hosannah, blessed be he who cometh in the name of the Lord." His kingdom did not come there and then as they had expected, and so now they are ready to turn about and assist in his arrest, and a few hours later on, shout themselves hoarse crying, "Crucify him, crucify him." They represent the people who live and act according to the drift of the tide and the set of the wind.

III.—THE PROTEST OF JESUS.

Jesus did not offer any resistance to his arrest, nor did he attempt to escape. His hour had come, and he surrendered himself into his enemies' hands, though he had first given them evidence that they had

no independent power over him. They took him because he suffered himself to be taken; at the same time, he uttered his indignant protest against the whole proceeding, both the arrest and the manner of it. It may be right for us to submit to wrong when it is in the pathway of duty, yet it does not follow that we must approve the wrong we submit to. So, though Jesus made no resistance to his arrest because this was in the way of appointment, yet he indignantly protests against the base cowardice of the whole matter and the iniquity which lay behind it.

1.—His indignation.—This is plainly detected in the matter and manner of his speech. In the first place, this company of soldiers and mob of club-bearers would imply that he was a dangerous and turbulent robber, who must be arrested and put down in this violent manner. This was probably a part of the malignant cunning of the priests, to create a false impression against him by dealing with him as though he were a dangerous robber. Here they began to number him with the transgressors. It was a part of the false accusation with which they were planning to blacken his name. To suffer is bad, but to be deliberately put in a false position and made to appear what we are not in the eyes of others, is an indignity worthy of resentment. Besides, coming out in this secret, midnight way, would imply that he was a conspirator who had done his work secretly and would attempt to escape any examination. "I was daily with you in your Temple and ye took me not." All this was probably addressed to the representative of the high priest, as a protest against their action in the matter. When he came to trial he did not open his mouth, but here he recorded his protest. This we all have a right to do.

2.—His calmness and gentleness.—There was indignation in his speech and manner, but there was neither violence, confusion, nor perturbation. Jesus was calm and deliberate; he was even gentle. Before surrendering, and while the crowd were in momentary confusion from the impetuous attack of Peter, he, with marvelous gentleness and kindness, turned to the wounded leader, and with a courteous request, "Suffer me, or permit me," he touched the wounded part and healed it. There was no bitterness or resentment in his indignation; nothing that ever came to him unbalanced him from his heavenly calmness. Indignant he might be, but no resentful anger stirred in his heart.

3.—His comfort.—"But the Scripture must be fulfilled." He breaks off suddenly, as much as to say: "Remonstrance is not my purpose. I do not seek to turn you aside for what you are doing. The Scripture must be fulfilled, and I am only going as it has been appointed for me to go." Christ always comforted himself with the

Scriptures. So might we comfort ourselves in all circumstances of trial if only the word of God dwelt in our hearts richly as it did in his. He who knows the Scriptures and loves them can never be taken by surprise or overthrown as to faith and confidence, no matter what comes. "All things work together for good" to God's children, and God reminds them of his purpose of grace in their direst extremities by bringing his word to their remembrance.

IV.—THE DESERTION.

When the disciples saw that he had unconditionally surrendered to his enemies, a sudden panic broke out among them, and without stopping to take counsel, either of the Master or of their own faith, they, with one accord, fled from his presence. One mysterious young man (perhaps Mark himself), who had been aroused by the passing mob, had hastily risen from his bed, flinging a sheet about his naked body, and obeying a generous impulse, interposed a protest; but it drew down a sudden wrath upon him. One of the soldiers laid his hands on him, to take him into custody, too. This frightened him, and as Matthew Henry says, "He fled back to his bed as suddenly as he had left it." Peter seems to have plucked up a little shame-faced courage, and followed, incognito, in the midst of the crowd, and "warmed himself by the enemy's fire," where he fell into temptation and disgrace. The fact that John followed afterward into the palace with Jesus, is the only relieving incident in connection with the utter desertion of Jesus by his friends in this bitter hour of loneliness. (John xviii, 15.)

LESSON XXII.

JESUS BEFORE THE COUNCIL.—Mark xiv, 55-65

GOLDEN TEXT.—They hated me without a cause.—John xv, 25.

And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death ; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ? And Jesus said, I am : and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses ? Ye have heard the blasphemy : what think ye ? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy ; and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.—Mark xiv, 55-65.

We have come now to the study of the most solemn page in human history. The Judge of all the earth is himself brought before the judgment-seat of men. False witnesses appear and give testimony against the Faithful Witness. Falschhood and lies surge against the Truth; the Innocent One is condemned by the guilty. The Son of God is adjudged a blasphemer by sinners. The Life of the world is condemned to death. The story of Mark is straightforward, simple, and direct, rather than minute; his purpose being to bring forward the main facts in the case rather than to dwell on details. The whole story ought to be studied in the light of the four accounts given by the evangelists. In this awful crime is seen, as in a mirror, the human heart, full of enmity and wrath, turned inside out and emptied in malice and wickedness upon the head of the Son of God. We are amazed, as we read, at the deviltry of the whole proceeding; at the hardihood of sin when it has brought forth its fruit to perfection.

I.—THE COURT.

It had been the plan of the chief priests not to arrest and proceed against Jesus until after the feast of the Passover ; but Jesus had

defeated their plans by expelling the traitor from the circle of the disciples, and they had been forced to take immediate proceedings, or endanger their entire programme. Hence, as we have seen, the hasty arrest of Jesus. Whilst the soldiers, under the direction of one of the trusted servants of the high priest, were gone to arrest Jesus, he had sent out in the middle of the night to summon to a private interview, at his own palace, the members of the Sanhedrim. It is doubtful whether every member of the council was present. We can hardly imagine that Annas or Caiaphas would have sent for Gamaliel or Nicodemus, or even Joseph of Arimathea, supposing these two to have been members of the Sanhedrim at the time; and perhaps there were others who would not have been thus privately summoned to sit with a packed council to pass a predetermined sentence of guilt against Jesus. At any rate, we know that the council, such as it was, was hastily summoned, and were together in more or less confusion.

1.—It was irregular and informal.—Though there was some pretense of following the forms of a judicial examination, it is evident that the tribunal before which Jesus was tried was an irregular one; constituted not according to law or usage. It was irregular as to time and place. It was not lawful to hold such a trial in the night-time, nor was it according to law to hold or conduct such a trial in the palace of the high priest. However, these conspirators were in no mood to stand upon formalities, or even upon the spirit of the law; besides, according to their own well-grounded fears, they dare not wait for the day for two reasons. A trial on the Sabbath, or a feast day, was not lawful, and they feared that the people, especially the people from Galilee, who were particularly attached to Jesus, would organize to defend and protect him from their power. Their necessity, not the necessities of justice, required that the business of condemning him should be gotten through with before the people could rise up to protest. Their consciences made them cowards in this matter, as it does in every case where injustice and crime are contemplated. They dreaded the light of day, because their deeds were evil.

2.—It was unjust.—The whole proceeding was as unjust as it was irregular. It makes one shudder to contemplate the doings of these men. Clothed with the garments of righteousness, and vested with the authority given by God, to stand between the innocent and the guilty, to punish crime and protect innocence, to vindicate and honor the law, they were now deliberately planning to overthrow all law and justice in the very name of God, whose representatives they officially were. They had already prejudged the case, and determined to bring

in a verdict of guilty against the innocent Jesus, not because he had given them any occasion, but because they were mad against him and feared him. To do this, they must themselves turn prosecutors as well as act as judges. So they sought witnesses against Jesus, "to put him to death." Jesus was not accused of wrong-doing in particular, or seditious designs in general. The utter injustice of the whole proceeding is most apparent. They had no right, under any circumstances, to turn prosecutors, much less seek after witnesses to prove Jesus guilty, and still less to seek for false witnesses. They acted in this matter as all haters of Jesus do who, having decided against his claims because they choose not to accept him as Saviour and Lord, seek to prove him false, and justify their rejection of him, even by inventing testimony against him. There is no class of unbelievers so unjust as those who are determined to reject Jesus, and so go their way of sin without reference to him as God, appointed Saviour, and Judge.

3.—It was an undignified proceeding throughout.—Their confusion and fear is manifest in every movement they made. The haste of it all—the irregular preliminary council in the house of Annas; the midnight summons of the absent members of the council; their evident fear and anxiety; their strange and unwarrantable proceeding in seeking for and suborning false witnesses; the rage of the high priest when the witnesses broke down in their testimony, either contradicting themselves or each other to such an extent that even they could not found an adverse judgment upon it, though they had determined to do so; the sudden and undignified up-springing of the high priest to remonstrate with Jesus because of his dignified silence, and the putting him under oath, hoping thereby that he would incriminate himself, all testify to the fact that back of the whole matter they were conscious of their weakness and afraid of the strength of Jesus. Their actions, taken together with their own bearing, furnish a record of proceedings which criminate them instead of Jesus. In this they are not unlike all the enemies of Christ in all ages. The methods of infidels have usually recoiled upon their own heads and left a judgment against themselves rather than against Jesus, whom they have sought to discredit. One of the surest ways to bring to nought the counsel of the ungodly is to suffer them to take their own course without attempting to hinder or oppose them. We have a great lesson to learn from the bearing of Jesus in this matter, who stood still while God was working out both his salvation and that of the world. If the advocates and defenders of the Gospel against the enemies of Christ, would cultivate the Spirit and example of Jesus, and leave God to vindicate them, their victory would be more speedy and certain.

II.—THE WITNESSES.

Who these witnesses were we do not know. No doubt the priests had a plan in their mind for bringing about the condemnation of Jesus, but the sudden precipitation of the matter upon their hands found them unprepared and without witnesses trained and instructed for the occasion. Possibly they had the men in mind, and had already agreed with them in a general way, but had not yet instructed them. They were sent for as suddenly and hastily as were the members of the council upon information received that Jesus had been arrested. There seems to have been more than one set of them. We are not told what those first examined had to say. It is enough that they did not agree with each other. No two of them could be found to testify to the same thing. So flagrantly discordant was the testimony, that even these conscienceless judges could not accept their testimony. They had spent their money in bribing witnesses who only did their unholy cause damage. Finally, they succeeded in finding "certain" men who stood up and bare witness (falsely) to what he had said on the occasion of the first purging of the Temple. These were possibly some of the servants of the high priest who had been present at that time. The matter here charged against Jesus was not to their purpose, for their plan was rather to incriminate him in some scheme to raise a sedition. On such a charge they might persuade Pilate to condemn him to death, for they had no power to execute the death sentence themselves, and they well knew that Pilate would pay no attention to any mere questions of their ceremonial and moral law. They distorted his saying in reference to the temple of his body, concerning which he had said to them when they had asked him a sign: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." This he spake concerning his body, and not concerning the Temple in which they were now standing. However, they chose to misunderstand him, and so secured witnesses to swear that they had "heard him say, I will destroy this Temple, that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." Of course, he said no such thing, but it suited their purpose to take something which he did say and misreport and misinterpret it, and then allege it against him as though he had threatened to bring up a force against the Temple, and at the same time secure allegiance to himself of a fanatical rabble, who somehow would be persuaded that he had miraculous power. Such a charge would arrest the attention of the Roman governor, and perhaps induce him to order Jesus to be crucified as a dangerous disturber of the peace. We do not know in what particular these last

witnesses failed, but evidently they broke down and contradicted each other in such a way that their testimony had to be thrown out. We almost conclude that in that council there must have been some one or two who were not so entirely lost to every sense of right and justice, that they would convict without the slightest semblance of agreement among the false witnesses. There are some lengths that even the worst of men will not go. Though they were willing to condemn Jesus, they were not willing that the last form of law and order in their proceedings should be torn into shreds and scattered to the winds. They were willing to accept the false witness, but they were not willing that it should be accepted in defiance of the commonest rules of evidence, which required that there should be agreement between at least two witnesses. These false witnesses are much like those men who, according to their different motives, allege different and disagreeing things against Jesus. We have only to read the various works of various infidels to see how utterly they are out of agreement with themselves in their testimony against Jesus. This break-down of the false witnesses leaves the Sanhedrim in a most humiliating predicament.

III.—THE PRISONER.

In the midst of all this, Jesus remained calmly silent. No doubt keenly alive to all that was being said and done, for we can not conceive of him being indifferent, yet "as a lamb going to the slaughter, and a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." We can fancy him standing there, calm and divinely dignified, with a marred countenance, sadly and pitifully looking on, for Jesus must have pitied those wretched men who were rushing on to their own destruction while they were hurrying him to death.

1.—**His silence.**—The priests were maddened by the failure of their false witnesses to give a sufficient testimony according to their contract; and this madness was increased to an ungovernable fury in the heart of the high priest, who could bear it no longer. Every thing seemed to be lost. They were about miserably to fail in their devilish purpose. The first streaks of the dawn were stealing into the palace. If they failed in getting a conviction, the coming day would quickly expose their proceedings to the multitudes in Jerusalem, and the tumult they feared would be raised and Jesus would be rescued. Forgetting his official dignity, the high priest springs from his seat and confronts Jesus with this impassioned question: "Answerest thou nothing; what is it which these witness against thee?" Here another violation of law and proceedings takes place. It was not for

the accused to straighten out the contradictions of the false witnesses. It was not for him to speak when nothing was proved against him; and yet the high priest would drag him into speech which might criminate himself. But Jesus maintained his silence. In that silence was his strength. There are times when false accusations are best answered by silence. This was one of those times. Besides, the silence of Jesus was the best protest and the most powerful rebuke he could utter. In that silence the council had opportunity to see for themselves how utterly irregular, unjust, and wicked the whole proceeding was. Had he opened his mouth to protest or to deny, it would have given them an opportunity to draw him into controversy, which would at least have turned their attention away from their own sin and folly. His silence, on the other hand, smote their consciences as with blows.

2.—His speech.—Abandoning all former lines of testimony, and in so doing acknowledging defeat, the high priest, in his desperation, challenges him on another point: "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" We know, from Matthew's account, that Jesus was solemnly put under oath and required to testify. It was not the oath that compelled him to speak, for they had no right in such an assembly to administer one, and besides, he was before them without accusation, especially on this point. It was the question which opened his mouth. If there was a time when accusations should be met with silence, a time had come when truth must be confessed, though death followed. This was now the crucial question in the whole controversy. Referring to the Messianic promise contained in the second Psalm, the high priest challenges him on that. "Do you pretend to lay claims to being the Messiah?" That they expected a Messiah, and believed that one would come, is taken for granted; that he would confess that he claimed to be the very Son of God, they feared, and yet prepared to condemn him on any charge, they were ready to pass judgment of blasphemy against him without investigating his claim. Jesus does so confess. He opened his mouth, and calmly and boldly declared himself to be the Son of God. There can be no doubt of the significance of this confession. He was either a deluded fanatic or a deliberate impostor. Never was such a claim made by a sane man or a good man. No religious teacher before or since Jesus, who has not been a manifest impostor or lunatic, ever made such a claim. Renan says of Jesus that he was the greatest religious genius who ever lived, and Strauss admits that we know enough of him to know that "his consciousness was unclouded by the memory of any sin." How, then, his enemies being his judges, can we account for this stupendous and exalted claim? Made under oath, made with the cross standing clearly

before his very eyes, there is no other alternative. He is either a blasphemer or he is the Son of God. All men must make their choice between these two positions. But this same Jesus, who unhesitatingly asserted his divinity, has dominated by his genius and his sinless character nineteen centuries. Could he have done so if he were either fanatic or impostor? We leave the rejecters of him to settle this difficulty among themselves.

IV.—THE JUDGMENT.

Fearing, and yet hoping, that Jesus would break silence and make this confession, the high priest is filled with a mad joy that at last he has gotten something upon which he can carry the council with him to a conviction. Without waiting to ask another question or to examine any evidence which Jesus might offer to support his claim, he at once rends his clothes. This was according to a prescribed form or ceremony in which the utmost religious horror was confessed. Not waiting for any member of the council to offer a word or put a question, he asks: "What need have we for any further witnesses? Ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?" His own impetuosity carried the council with him. Swept by the wild enthusiasm of his hate and determination against Jesus, they all consented that he had spoken blasphemy, and concurred in a hasty judgment that he was guilty of death. Thus did the wicked ruler impute guilt to the Holy One and the Just; but the judgment was as false as it was irregular, and unjust in every particular. They all believed that Messiah was to come—that he would come as a man; how did they know that Jesus was not he? They had simply prejudged the case, and so gave their sentence. It is so with many to-day. They have decided, in their own hearts, that Jesus is not the Christ, and so, without inquiry or examination, they close the case against *him*, but much more against *themselves*.

V.—THE JUDGMENT TO COME.

The breaking of silence on the part of Jesus was more than to confess that he was the Son of God. He goes further, and solemnly arraigns his judges before the awful judgment-seat of God, on which he whom they are now condemning will sit. The high priest had based his question on the second Psalm. Jesus takes it up, and carries his confession beyond a simple affirmation of his divine Sonship. He now appropriates and applies to himself that majestic prophecy of Messianic glory spoken by Daniel in the seventh chapter of his prophecy, and declares that, after they had condemned and crucified him as a blas-

-phemer, they should see him, the "Son of man, sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Had they been less mad and determined in their course of iniquity, they would have halted at the announcement of this solemn challenge. Alas! that sin does so blind men; that enmity to God, when once it fairly wakes up in the heart, will so drive men to rush upon the very bosses of Jehovah's buckler and hurl themselves against the very throne of judgment. We wonder that it does not occur to sinners now, that their denial of Jesus does not dispose of him nor set them free from the judgment to come. Why do not men tremble at the very thought of trampling under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant wherewith they are sanctified an unclean thing, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace? Because, when men give themselves up to sin and to Satan, they become mad, and know not what they do.

VI.—THE BUFFETING.

Jesus has spoken. The council has passed its sentence; Jesus is judged guilty of death. The false zeal of the rulers now gives place to the coarse zeal of their servants and followers. Perhaps even some of those honorable (?) councilors, together with their servants, advanced, and smote this divine sufferer, this innocent victim of human malice, and spat in his face. What a spectacle! Our hearts tremble as we contemplate these coarse insults, and our pen refuses to write about it. Jesus resumes his silence, and offers no resistance. He is voluntarily stepping down into the lowest depths of his humiliation. His bearing, under these shameful mockings and buffetings, is only another proof of his divinity. It has been well said, that "he was either the most pusillanimous of men, or else he was none other than God himself." The question remains for each of us to decide whether we will take the part of Jesus or that of the council. There is no middle ground.

LESSON XXIII.

JESUS BEFORE PILATE.—Mark xv, 1–20.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him.—John xix, 6.

And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it. And the chief priests accused him of many things; but he answered nothing. And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled. Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Pretorium; and they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.—Mark xv, 1–20.

Passing over the incident of Peter's denial of Jesus in the palace of Caiaphas, we are introduced by our narrator into the presence of the events which began that dreadful series that fill all the hours of the day we call "Good Friday," the most memorable day in this world's history. The farcical trial of Jesus which had been so irregularly, illegally, and unjustly conducted in the palace of the high priest, was now supplemented by a formal calling together of the entire Sanhedrim early in the morning. Jesus having already been prejudged and delivered to the indignities of the servants of the high priest, was pre-

sented to the formally organized council. The events of the past night were rapidly rehearsed, and the council, formally indorsing the informal proceedings of the high priest and his fellow conspirators, bind Jesus with shackles and lead him away to Pilate, the Roman governor, from whom they were determined to secure an official decree ordering him to death. We see in this the same dogged and wicked determination to put Jesus to death at all hazards and in spite of all righteousness or justice. Mark's account of the whole matter is most rapid and brief. The student should read carefully the several accounts given by the other evangelists to fill up the history with its proper details. The graphic account of this last day of Jesus on the earth, is a remarkable setting forth of the combined rejection of Jesus by the world. There is throughout this account no hint that a single friend or follower of Jesus was present, or if present, no voice was uplifted to save him or plead for him, save, indeed, the feeble remonstrances of the man who finally delivered him to death, Pilate. Jesus trod the wine-press alone; he looked, and there was none to help him, perchance none to pity him. See the combination: Jerusalem, by her rulers and the voice of the people, cried out: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate, the representative of human government; and the soldiers, whose home was the whole world; all engaged together, to reject and destroy the Son of God. And yet the day will come when every knee shall bow to and every tongue confess him Lord of lords and King of kings, whom now they revile, condemn, mock, and crucify. That day is deferred, in mercy to us, that we may make haste to confess him as Saviour unto our salvation, lest we be found with them who must confess him as Judge when it is too late to call upon him as Deliverer.

I—JESUS DELIVERED TO PILATE.

Human history certifies to us the reality of this man and his position as governor, in Judea, under the Roman power. Divine history links his name with Jesus of Nazareth, and the Church of Jesus Christ, through her oldest creed, has branded him as the crucifier of the Son of God, the world's Redeemer. There can be no question of the truth of this awful history—awful when considered from the human side, but blessed when considered from the side of God's eternal purpose of grace towards sinners, and Jesus' heavenly love in carrying out that purpose at the cost of his own self-sacrifice for our sins. Pilate, of whom but faint glimpses are had in this account, so far as his character is concerned, we learn from a comparison of the various accounts given by the several evangelists, was a weak man, who strove

to steer his way between the difficulties which beset him on every side. He was desirous, apparently, to release Jesus, and yet afraid to do what he knew to be right. His instincts and training as a Roman, would have led him to dismiss Jesus from custody as soon as he found that he was delivered without cause, simply as a matter of hatred and envy by the Jews; his admiration of Jesus prompted him to the same course; his superstitious fears, deepened by the dream and warning of his wife, still further inclined him to this course; but his love of power and fear of the Jewish influence at the court of Cæsar, where he was but a half-favorite, led him, at last, to trample under foot natural impulses, trained habits of impartial justice and superstitious fears, and at last crucify him whom he knew to be innocent, and crimson his hands in the blood of the Son of God, the stains of which he vainly tried to purge from his soul by washing them in water.

1.—Jesus accused by the Jews.—In delivering Jesus to Pilate, the Jews at first tried to thrust him forward with vague charges as being a malefactor without specifications, hoping that Pilate would accept their judgment and ratify it without question. This Pilate was not ready to do, but insisted on knowing what he was charged with. They now abandon all consistency, and charge him before Pilate with that which they did not charge him before their council. They well knew that Pilate would pay no attention to any questions concerning his Sonship with God, for claiming which he had been adjudged guilty of blasphemy; so they charged him with having organized a political rebellion, claiming to be the King of the Jews, and forbidding the people to pay tribute to Cæsar, and stirring up the people throughout the land to sedition and revolution. All these charges were grossly false, but they knew they were such as would compel Pilate to take account of them; and they trusted that Jesus, who had so fearlessly confessed to his Messiahship before their council, would not deny that he was the King of the Jews. But what strange and frightful inconsistency was here on the part of the Jews! The one absorbing desire and hope of their lives was that a political Messiah would arise, who would stir up the people to successful rebellion and throw off the Roman yoke, and establish them in independent political power again. They hated Jesus because he would not do this, but insisted on the establishment of a kingdom of truth among men; yet they make a false charge based on that which they most ardently desired. Was there ever such perfect illustration of the inconsistencies of determined heart-opposition to God and the truth as is here seen?

2.—Jesus questioned and confessing.—To their accusation Pilate responded by questioning Jesus. "Art thou the King of the

Jews?" Or as some have rendered it: "So, thou art the King of the Jews?" This, partly as a sneer and partly as a serious inquiry. As though he would, while going through the forms of Roman justice, heap reproach and contempt on the Jews, whom he sincerely hated and held in contempt. To his question this silent and august prisoner (who had not the least appearance of a turbulent political malcontent or ambitious leader, so different from any prisoner who had ever been brought before him) made answer: "Thou sayest it." That is: "I am." This is all that Mark gives us, but John tells us that Jesus, in connection with his affirmation, quickly disentangled his claims from those false charges of political sedition which the Jews had fabricated against him, explaining that his kingdom was not a political one, else would his followers have fought for him; but a kingdom of truth, of principle and righteousness; and that his mission in the world was to deliver men from falsehood and sin, and organize them into a spiritual kingdom whose seat and government was in heaven, and not earth. The answer of Jesus profoundly impressed Pilate, at least for a moment, and convinced him still further that Jesus was innocent of any offense which he might take cognizance of, and would have at once discharged him. But it was not to be so, either in the purpose of God or in the strength of the governor's sense of right and justice.

3.—Jesus hard pressed and silent.—The Jews, hearing Jesus' answer to Pilate, and noting the effect of it upon the mind of the governor, began at once vehemently to press their charges with persistent vociferation and bitterness. The expression, "accused him of many things," carrying with it the idea of "hard pressing him with accusations," rather than with a multitude of charges. They determined to overthrow his declaration of innocence and break the force of his lucid exposition of his claim and mission by bitter insistence on the charges which they had constructed against him. To their vociferous accusations, Jesus preserved a calm and dignified silence. To them he would say nothing. He well knew that no answer would satisfy them, because they had determined, without reference to truth or righteousness, to deliver him to death; besides, his testimony to them was done, except when his Sonship was called in question. So Jesus was silent. What a majestic silence it was! More mighty than any speech! It was something like that awful silence that filled the whole city when the darkness overspread it at the time of his crucifixion. Pilate was awed and amazed by it, and determined to release Jesus, if possible, that is, if he could bring it about without endangering any interest of his own, for this selfishness

of his was ever present with him, as it is with all those who, convinced of the truth concerning Jesus, are yet determined to hold fast to any sin or self-interest which might be imperiled by boldly taking Christ's side.

II.—BARABBAS CHOSEN.

At this point an episode occurred which, for the moment, gave Pilate hope that he might yet effect the release of Jesus. It was a custom on this feast-day for the Jews to demand of the Roman governor the release of some prisoner who, for any reason, was a favorite with the people. At this time there was a noted prisoner bound in the fortress awaiting execution. His name was Barabbas, and it seems that he was a kind of popular idol who, perhaps, made some pretensions to patriotism, under cover of which he perpetrated robbery. He was the son of some distinguished man, perhaps some popular rabbi, and had succeeded in leading a mob against the constituted authorities, in the course of which murder was committed. Whilst Pilate was dealing with the Jews concerning Jesus, the multitude began to come about the judgment hall, and, according to custom, demand the release of the prisoner whom they would designate. Hoping to take advantage of this opportunity, Pilate quickly asked the people if he should release unto them "the King of the Jews?" By this two things appear. First, that he unwittingly counted him as a condemned man, and second, that he was ready to recognize him as King of the Jews from Jesus' point of view, and as being more worthy of the favor of the people than any favorite political prisoner whom he might have in custody. Besides, he heartily wanted to baffle the Jews, that is, the leaders, whom he knew had brought Jesus before him with no sincere intent to conserve the peace and honor of the Roman government, but solely because of their envious hatred of him. The Jews were quick to see the danger to their plans of this flank movement of Pilate, and estimating rightly the weakness of his character, quickly incited the people to demand the release of Barabbas, probably counting also on their ignorance of the merits of the case in which Jesus was involved. It is apparent that the Jews were triumphant, and the rabble cried out for the release of Barabbas. (John xviii, 40.)

1.—Pilate's dilemma.—Baffled in his effort to release Jesus, he found himself now in a dilemma. He had, in a sense, counted Jesus as a condemned prisoner, in order that he might release him; but since the people refused to demand him, he now had Jesus on his hands, practically condemned. "What, then, will ye that I shall do with him whom ye call King of the Jews?" This was evidently addressed to

the rulers. It is their opportunity, as it was Pilate's dilemma. So they instantly seized upon their advantage, and demanded his crucifixion. Pilate must now decide. He had exhausted every expedient, including the sending of him to Herod (Luke xxiii, 7), and now must either release him absolutely, on his own authority and without reference to the clamor of the rulers, or accede to their wicked demands. We can not help thinking that Jesus is still present and on the hands of every unconverted man. What will he do with Jesus? He must be disposed of. No one can shirk the responsibility of a decision in respect to him. Let us each ask the question of ourselves: What will we do with Jesus? For we must decide for ourselves, without reference to what others would have us do with him. The rejection of Jesus by others, can not be a justification of our rejection of him. We must either acknowledge him as Saviour and Lord, or join hands with those who cry out, "Let him be crucified!"

2.—The Jews' responsibility.—Having heard their decision, Pilate makes one more desperate effort to save Jesus and himself from a final decision against him. "Why, what evil hath he done?" Their only answer was: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Thus blind unbelief, without reason, only persists in rejecting Jesus from being Saviour and Lord. But this is a very pertinent question. It is required of believers, that they give a reason for the hope they have in Christ. It is equally required that unbelievers give a reason for their unbelief and rejection of Christ. What is the reason men, women, and children are found by hundreds, who still reject Jesus and practically cry out: "Crucify him!" Is it because he is a bad man; is it because the influence of his life, teachings, and death have been bad during all these ages; is it because his doctrines are hard and forbidding, who taught that God loves the world and longs for its salvation; is it because the terms of salvation are hard and impossible; is it because his burden is heavy and his yoke galling? Nay, is it not because to accept him is to bring us face to face with God; to see sin as God sees it? Is it not because to accept Jesus is to admit the demerit and guilt of sin; is it not because to accept Jesus is to abandon sin, to turn away from the empty and passing pleasures of the world and its still more delusive possessions, and to set our affections upon things above? Is it not, in fact, because we are averse to the life of Christ being repeated in our lives? Still, the question recurs: "What evil has he done that he has so many enemies; that the great mass of mankind persist in denying him, and would fain have him put out of their way? Some day, every rejecter of Christ will have to give answer to a higher tribunal than that of Pilate's for their rejection.

3.—Pilate's decision.—Fearing that he would yield to his better impulses and just convictions and release Jesus, the Jews at last declared that if he did not crucify Jesus he would declare himself the enemy of Cæsar. This touched him in his weakest spot, and fearing to incur the imperial displeasure or defend himself there against any charges of disloyalty which the Jews might bring against him, and willing to quiet them whom he both now feared and hated, he finally gave his decision, released Barabbas, and delivered Jesus over into the hands of the soldiers, to be scourged and crucified. Thus did Pilate join hands with the envious Jews, and become a party with them to the murder of the Son of God. The Jews filled up the cup of their sin and completed their apostasy when they cried out : “ We have no king but Cæsar ! ” They abandoned, in that cry, their Messianic hopes, and cast off God. In turn, they have been cast off. Pilate passed the boundary line of grace which our Lord so lovingly gave him, and in the sentence of death against Christ, committed the suicide of his own soul.

III.—JESUS MOCKED AND SCOURGED.

Jesus is now in the hands of the Gentiles. His own prophecy is fulfilled. Mark passes over the particulars of this dreadful scene quickly. It is awful to contemplate it. Stripped, and with hands bound over a post or pillar, the cruel and merciless scourge is laid upon his back until it is a mass of torn and bleeding flesh. Then the whole ribald band of soldiers assemble about him, and clothing him in an old, worn-out purple robe, in token of mock royalty, they plait a crown of thorns, place it upon his brow, and beat it into his skin with a reed which they had thrust into his hands as a mock scepter. They bow the knee and scoff and jeer. This they did till they had sated all their brutal instincts. But what of it all ? The Jews would dishonor him with the cross, yet he has honored the cross ; they would make an end of his influence by crucifying him, and yet his death is that which has made him King over twenty centuries and in millions of hearts. Jesus descended this bitter way of humiliation, but found it to be the way to his throne. His humiliation and death was the pathway to his glory, and is the highway of our salvation.

LESSON XXIV.

JESUS CRUCIFIED.—Mark xv, 21-39.

GOLDEN TEXT.—He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.—Phil. ii, 8.

And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross. And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. And they that passed by railled on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.—Mark xv, 21-39.

The miserable farce of a trial, and the mockery of justice, was at last concluded. Jesus had been delivered over by Pilate into the hands of the brutal soldiers to be crucified. They had had their coarse "fun" with him whom they had scourged, and re-clothing him with his own garments, stained with his blood still oozing from his lacerated back, they led him away to be crucified. Crucifixion was not a Jewish mode of execution, yet execrating every thing that was Roman, the rulers had demanded that this most execrable mode of death should be visited upon him whom they hated more than they did the Romans, whom they regarded as their chief ene-

mies. Our earliest creed charged Pontius Pilate with the crucifixion of our Lord, and truly, in so far as that he sanctioned and ordered it; but the guilt of the whole matter must forever rest upon the heads and souls of the Jewish rulers. They had incited and morally compelled the Roman to do this deed, and forgetting all dignity, and callous to every lingering sentiment of respect and decency, they followed the Saviour out to the place of execution, and there added their last insults to him as he hung upon the cursed tree, and incited the passers-by to mock him even in his last agony. That the guilt of it all was theirs, and not the Romans', was clearly sent home by Peter when he boldly charged them with having "taken and with wicked hands crucified and slain the Lord of glory." How bitterly this horrible murder came back upon them in the after time, when, during the siege and sacking of Jerusalem, Jews were crucified in every street, by scores and hundreds, until there were scarcely places for the crosses to stand or wood enough left out of which to construct new ones. Thus came the blood of the murdered Son of God back upon their heads, and upon their children, even as they had invoked it when they assumed the responsibility of his death.

In this last chapter of our Lord's earthly history, his sufferings culminated. The horrors of the cross have been too often described to make it necessary for us now to even review them. Our Lord's agony was a threefold one—physical, which was common to every sufferer who died thus; mental, which was peculiar to him because none other ever suffered the mental agony which was his in that hour; his highly organized and almost divinely sensitive human soul, suffered all the shame of the horrible indignities and injustice which it was his to bear; all the disgrace of being numbered with the transgressors, and being counted guilty by the whole multitude; not to speak of the agony of desertion by his disciples. Besides all this, he was enduring that far more exquisite mental suffering which was his because he felt the guilt of others, and was consumed with a sympathy which was akin to guilt in his own soul. In addition to this, he was suffering a spiritual agony which lay deeper than the possibility of human knowledge to understand. As the divinely-appointed sin-offering, he was being consumed by the slow burning fires of divine justice. At his Father's hands he was enduring desertion, and at the hands of Justice, he was receiving the stroke due to sinners for whom he died. The Lord, having laid on him the iniquity of us all, he was being wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and receiving the stripes due as chastisement for our sins. This was the holiest of holies, the innermost secret place of the sufferings of Christ. How

utterly alone he was in it all is seen in the conspiracy of events and persons which had brought it about. Speaking of Golgotha, where he suffered, one of the evangelists says: "There they crucified him." Who was it that crucified him? And step by step, how did he come to be crucified? Beginning with the treason of Judas, he suffered the lonely agony of the garden, without the human sympathy he so much craved, for his disciples slept in apparently careless indifference while he agonized; then they all forsook him and fled; then Peter forswore him even in his own hearing; the chief priest, the elders and rulers of his people mocked him with a farce of a trial, and branded him as a blasphemer; the menials of the palace had spit in his face, and smitten him in the mouth, and plucked the hair from his cheeks; Pilate had weakly delivered him over to the fury of the mob; Herod had derided him; the miserable and brutal soldiers had scourged and insulted him; and now the last indignity was put upon him when he was taken out and crucified between two thieves; and to crown all, in the hour of his bitterest agony, his Father in heaven had forsaken him. How utterly alone he was! Was there ever such a man; was there ever such a sufferer; was there ever such a lover of men as this Man of Nazareth? We have not much to do in reviewing the details of the scene as swiftly and briefly sketched by Mark; only to point out the minor and major details of the awful event.

I.—THE MINOR DETAILS.

Those who wish to study the whole of the details, we refer to the completer accounts as given by Matthew, Luke, and John, particularly to those of John, the only one of the four who recorded the events of this dreadful day.

1.—**Simon the Cyrenian.**—We do not know who this man was, unless we are content to believe he was the father of the same Rufus mentioned by Paul. (Rom. xvi, 13.) This is not improbable. Simon seems to have been entering the city from the north as the procession accompanying Jesus to the place of execution was passing out of the last gate. Jesus was bearing his cross, as the custom was, but was overborne with fatigue and physically exhausted by the extraordinary sufferings through which he had passed during the last twenty-four hours, in which he had had neither food nor sleep. Do we wonder at it? The mental, moral, and spiritual strain incident to the exposure and expulsion of Judas from the Paschal Supper; the long discourse and tender good-bye with his disciples; the terrible agony in the garden, where he was so nearly exhausted in connection with the mysterious

conflict with the powers of darkness and the bloody sweat, that an angel had to come and strengthen him, lest he should have died in the garden; the arrest, and long night trials and buffetings in the palaces of Annas and Caiaphas; the trial before Pilate; then the journey to Herod's house and back again to Pilate; the further trial and the final condemnation, supplemented by the horrible brutalities of the soldiers. No wonder the Son of man was overcome. Surely, he can be touched with every feeling of our infirmities. Falling exhausted to the ground as Simon was passing by, the soldiers seized on him and impressed him into the service, and compelled him to bear the cross of Jesus, while he was supported by others on the way, for the words "bring him to the place Golgotha," suggest the idea of being carried or supported. We do not know that Simon was a disciple at this time—probably not; but surely, we may well believe, especially if he were the father of Rufus, of Rome, to whom Paul alluded, that this day made him one. At any rate, it was a most blessed honor that was conferred on him, though at the time he knew it not, when he was chosen to bear his Lord's cross. We should learn that the crosses that come to us by the way, though they may not seem pleasant or desirable at the time, may prove to us the greatest blessing and honor that can come. Surely, in this we have a little picture of what it is to take up the cross and come after Jesus. And who would not bear a cross if by so doing he might, in any least way, lighten the awful load that Jesus bore for us?

2.—The place Golgotha.—The actual place of our Lord's crucifixion is not known. It was probably on the north side of the city, not far from the highway leading in from the country, and adjacent to certain gardens given up to private tombs, among which was that of Joseph of Arimathea. It was called the place of the skull, not because it was a common ground of execution, or because, as has been fancied, there were lying exposed there the skulls of former criminals who had been executed, but rather because it was a round, knob-like eminence, which had been so named because of its resemblance to the human skull. There is such an eminence there to this day. It is not material to us, however, where the place was, since we have not to do with the place of the skull, but with him who was executed there.

3.—The wine mingled with myrrh.—It was a humane custom, said to have been maintained by the women of Jerusalem, to prepare and minister this drink to condemned criminals, who were led away to execution, for the purpose of deadening their sensibilities before suffering the awful agonies of the cross. They offered this draught to Jesus. He, however, refused it, for the reason, doubtless, that he who was offering himself a voluntary sacrifice would not, by even so small an

exemption, withhold an iota from the full measure of sacrifice. He, of all others, would not cloud his brain or benumb his consciousness in the offering he was about to make. He would drink this cup to the dregs, he would immerse himself in this baptism to the full. May we not learn from this, how wicked and unbecoming it is to resort to the stupefying cup of drink, which many do to drown sorrow and trouble when they come upon us? We need our full and unimpaired faculties with which to take and drink the cup of afflictions and chastisements which God sends to us. Of course, this remark is not to be construed as deprecating the use of anæsthetics for the purpose of deadening pain, when such pain can have no relation to spiritual ministry and is needless in the economy of life. It only means that we have no right to escape, by such means, any suffering which may be sent us in the course of special providence—pain which affects the soul rather than the body.

4.—The parting of his garments.—It was the right, according to a custom of the soldiers, to divide the clothing of executed criminals among themselves. Four soldiers, especially assigned to each criminal, was the lot. Those who were assigned to prepare and place Jesus on a cross having finished their cruel work, now sat down to divide the spoil. There was one garment more valuable than all the rest—that seamless one, which another evangelist speaks of. This they could not divide, and so they had to cast lots for it, thus fulfilling, to the letter, a prophecy concerning him. (Ps. xxii.) But we are reminded of others besides these four soldiers, who sit under the cross of Christ, unheeding the awful and blessed meaning of his death, and divide his garments among themselves. We mean those persons who, while they care nothing for Jesus and give him not even one loving or serious thought, are content to avail themselves of the external benefits which have come to the world from the Crucified One. All the beneficial institutions and influences of Christianity they will gladly avail themselves of, while they reject Jesus Christ. How many there are in every community who only deal with the garments of Christ! The Christian Church, the Christian Sabbath, Christian educational institutions, Christian charities, and all the best of Christian civilization—these they eagerly seize upon, while caring nothing for him who brought them all to the world.

II.—THE MAJOR DETAILS.

We can not but see a very irony of Providence in the incidents brought out in connection with the crucifixion; and chiefly in this, that the Jews, who were passionately longing for the sight of that Mes-

siah who was to come and sweep away the yoke and government of their enemies, were now delivering into the hands of their enemies he who only could deliver them. Passionately longing for a king, they were the chief instruments in slaying him who was their king. Because they did not love his righteousness and truth, they cast from them his power, and by rejecting him they enlisted the Romans, who hated them and whom they hated, to accomplish their utter desolation. Did ever sin so turn upon and rend those who were guilty as in this case?

1.—The superscription.—Pilate had ordered that the customary superscription that was placed over the head of every executed criminal, giving the name and the crime for which he was executed, should, in the case of Jesus, bear the title: "THE KING OF THE JEWS." This, no doubt, was done in a fit of spite and retaliation on his part, and was intended to humiliate and insult them. They passionately protested against it, but to no purpose. There it was, and what he had written he had written. It must stay, and advertise to their eyes both their crime and their humiliation. They had flaunted in the face of the Roman power, again and again, that there would arise from among them a king who would sweep them away and restore their kingdom to them. Now, with one stroke, Pilate mocks them. They had delivered up their king, and he had crucified him. It was as though he had said: "This is your boasted king; and this is how you have treated him." But Pilate wrote a sentence and made a proclamation that was more grandly true, in every respect, than he knew. Jesus is King, not only of the Jews, but of men and of saints everywhere. Of his kingdom, when he comes in the clouds of heaven, there will be no end. Already he has triumphed over both his Jewish and his Gentile murderers, and sways the scepter of his grace over more millions than any earthly empire ever boasted.

2.—The two thieves.—The humiliation of Jesus was completed when he was thus placed conspicuously between these two robbers, perhaps a part of the band of Barabbas. How much meaning there is in it! He was numbered with the transgressors. Thus was the prophecy of him fulfilled. He stands, to-day, between all transgressors. The final penitence of one of them and the final bitter and hardened rejection of him by the other, affords us a parable of the action of all men and the destiny of all, accordingly as they cry out to him for mercy or continue in unbelief and mockery with those who reject him.

3.—The mocking multitude.—Standing by and passing to and fro, was a crowd of people, in the midst of whom stood the chief priests, who had come to see their hellish work completed, and flaunt their triumph in the face of Jesus, whom they crucified. They railed

upon him, and insulted him with every conceivable taunt and jeer. Among others, they selected such sayings and incidents out of his life as they thought would sting him the deepest. But they little knew, perhaps, that they were both vindicating his claims, which they denied and derided, and comforting his own soul. "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days." How little they understood that his prophecy was now being literally fulfilled! They had wrested that saying of his to convict him, and now they were doing the very thing and bringing to pass the very sign which he spoke of. They were destroying the temple of his body, as he had said, and in three days he would build it again. They carried his thought forward to his resurrection. "Save thyself, and come down from the cross." No, he would not save himself *from* the cross, because he came to save sinners *by* the cross. He would not come down from the cross, as they mockingly challenged him to, but he would come down from it to be exalted by the right hand of God to be a prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance and remission of sins, perhaps, to these, his revilers; certainly to all who will look to him. And the chief priest also joined in, most probably incited this method of reviling. They cried out in mockery: "Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend from the cross, that we may see and believe." This taunt, on their part, was perhaps intended to prevent the people from thinking too seriously of the inscription above his head. They wanted a sign, or pretended to want one, which would enable them to see and believe. They did not get it, but, blessed be God, millions since have seen him, by faith, down from that cross, as well as on it, and have received the blessing that he has pronounced upon those whom "having not seen yet believe."

4.—The darkness and the cry.—It was now the sixth hour. Twelve o'clock. For three hours he had been hanging there. Meantime, comforting the sorrowing "daughters of Jerusalem," consigning his mother to the keeping of John, and charging this solitary disciple, who attended his last hours, to be a son to his blessed mother. For the rest, he had but a word of forgiveness for all their cruelty and sin. The supreme hour of his agony was now come. He had exhausted the suffering which man could inflict, and the time had arrived when God himself would deal with him, and the sacrifice Godward would be made. For this a supernatural darkness was gathered over the scene. Silence and darkness. Why not? It could not be otherwise. What eye could behold the mystery of that expiation? Left alone, he endured for three mortal hours what no mortal could have borne. We know not what it was, but we know when it was leveled up to the brim of his ability to bear, his soul burst out with a cry such as was

never heard in earth or heaven before: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This cry marked the extreme point of his suffering and sacrifice. Forsaken he had been by friends, and abandoned to the worst that man could do by his foes; but now forsaken by God himself, his soul could bear no more. That forsaking of Jesus by the Father, can only be explained on the theory that he was suffering the extreme consequences demanded of the Ransomer of sinners. This is the only one of the sayings which Mark has preserved from among the seven last sayings of Christ on the cross. Whatever it meant, the Father heard the cry and the darkness passed away, thus signifying that the "sufferings of Christ," which it behoved him to suffer, were past. The mistake which some made, supposing he had cried out for Elias, was not permitted to interfere with the entire fulfillment of the divine purpose.

5.—The loud voice.—That was the cry, not of a victim, not of a vanquished man, but the cry of a victor. "It is finished," was his cry. It was not death that conquered Jesus, but rather Jesus who had endured the cross until the last penalty and demand of God for sin was met, who triumphed over death. "He dismissed his spirit." Active to the last, he dismissed his own spirit and chased death through the grave down into the dark region of the under world, and conquered all its mysterious powers, whence he arose on the third day, and led them bound to the chariot of his resurrection, and made a show of them openly.

6.—The rending of the Temple veil.—At the moment of his triumphant cry and the dismissing of his spirit, the veil that separated the holiest of all from the holy place in the Temple was rent in twain. This signified the ending of the old ceremonial dispensation, and that the way to God was now opened, not by a human priest and sacrifice of bulls and goats, but by a new and living way through his flesh by an offering of his own blood made once for all, and by which he has obtained eternal redemption for us. (Heb. x, 19-22.) The old Jewish dispensation passed away with the death of Christ. Henceforth, the way back to God is opened to all men without the intervention of priest or sacrifice other than Jesus Christ himself, who is the sum and substance of all that the old ritual and ceremonials of the Jews signified and promised.

7.—This man was the Son of God.—The Jews had delivered him over for blasphemy because he called himself the Son of God. It is a significant fact that they, having rejected him and delivered him into the hands of the Gentiles for so calling himself, that a Gentile, to whom the duty of carrying out his execution was committed, was the

first to confess him to be the "Son of God." Here was our Lord's first Gentile convert. Truly with him, having followed the whole course of our Lord's life, we too must say (and let us say it reverently, believingly, and with all our hearts), "Truly, this man was the Son of God."

LESSON XXV.

JESUS RISEN.—Mark xvi, 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.—I. Cor. xv, 20.

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.—Mark xvi, 1-13.

Three hours of darkness and stillness while Christ hung on the cross; then the veil of the Temple was rent, and the centurion confessed that Jesus was the Son of God. Three days of darkness and stillness in the earth, in the which time ceased to be counted; then the grave of Jesus was burst asunder, and he was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." (Rom. i, 4.) Before the Jewish Sabbath began the Lord was buried. During that day we have no account of things. What a day of restlessness on the part of the disciples on that day of rest! Their hopes were dead with their crucified Lord, whom they had hoped should have redeemed Israel! The men disciples had gone their way in hopeless despair. John had taken the Blessed Mother to his house; Joseph and Nicodemus had done their kindly and brave offices of respect to the body of Jesus, whom they had almost accepted as the Messiah. Gloom hung over the household of faith. Fear and anxiety still filled

the breasts of the rulers; for they remembered what the disciples had forgotten, namely, that Jesus had again and again said that he would rise from the dead, especially his calm and emphatic declaration, made under oath when he was before Caiaphas, that he would rise and sit on the right hand of power, and come in glory to possess the everlasting kingdom of Messiah; therefore, before the dawn of the Sabbath, they had secured a guard of soldiers to watch the grave. These, and other particulars, are passed over by Mark in his rapid narrative, for he had only in mind to record the fact of the resurrection. The omission of details in this singular narrative—indeed, in all the accounts of the resurrection—is one of the strong proofs of the genuineness of the story and the reality of the facts related. There is no mention or attempt at conjecture of what happened to Jesus during the time of his sojourn in the under world; no account of how he was raised from the dead; whether his soul was escorted back to his body by angels, or how the first pulses of the resurrection life acted upon the dead body, or in what way it was changed into the marvelous body of glory which it evidently was after its revival. Nobody saw him rise or leave the grave. The fact to be laid hold of is that he is risen and was certainly alive from the dead. Not another, but the same Jesus who had been crucified; not a spirit, but a man with a body of flesh and bones. Life and immortality is brought to light by his resurrection from the dead. A new life has dawned upon the world, and the whole course of its history has been changed wherever his resurrection has been preached. Without discussing any of the proofs of the resurrection, which none of the immediate eye-witnesses of the fact ever thought of doing, we can not but wonder how it would have been possible for the subsequent events which characterized the inauguration and have ever since marked the progress of Christianity and are its underlying and indisputable facts to-day, could have ever taken place. How came these confused and despairing disciples, who lost both hope and courage when their Lord was crucified, to become possessed with a new hope that filled their whole being, nerved with a courage that made them very lions for boldness. What was it that energized them to confront the very men and generation that crucified Jesus with all the power of Church and State at their back, and charge them with his murder and at the same time in his name preach to them forgiveness? If Christ be not risen, how has that early enthusiasm continued from generation to generation among those who, not having seen, have yet believed in the risen Christ? How can we account for the elevation of human morality, the sanctification of human character, the triumph of a heavenly life over the lower and even brutal instincts of man, wherever and ever

since Jesus and the resurrection have been preached? Can it be that a mere myth has wrought all that has been accomplished in the name of Christ in all these ages? Can it be that a mere fitful imagination of a few hysterical women, who constructed a story of resurrection out of half-waking dreams, has done all this, and continues to do it? Can it be that a falsehood, deliberately planned and persistently pushed in the face of torture and death, has exercised for centuries the most quickening and truth-inspiring influence on all classes of men? It is impossible to account for what has been and is accomplished in the name of Christ, if the story of his resurrection is either myth, delusion, or falsehood; for be it known, that it is the resurrection of Jesus that has been the keystone in the arch of constructive Christianity. All his life, his teachings, and his death hinge on his resurrection; for if Christ be not risen, then our faith is vain: we are yet in our sins, and they who have fallen asleep in the hope of immortality are perished, and the very promulgators of those best and most blessed hopes which have ever animated the hearts and lives of men, are perjured witnesses. We refuse to accept any rationalistic or mythical theory of the resurrection, for the simple reason that the mind is incapable of it without first suffering the suicide of its best powers.

I.—THE VISIT OF THE WOMEN TO THE TOMB.

Among those who had followed Jesus, and loved him best, and believed in him the most, were some noble women, noble not by any accident of birth, but in character; among whom was Mary of Magdala, who had been greatly afflicted with devils who had possessed her, and whom Jesus, during his earthly ministry, had cast out and driven forth from her. She, with another Mary and one other woman, whose name was Salome, had waited with sorrowing love, during that dreary Sabbath day, until the dawn of the first day of the week to go to the tomb of Jesus, that they might do with more deliberation, and with better and more loving skill, what Joseph and Nicodemus had hastily done on the Friday night after the crucifixion. They did not look for resurrection. They had forgotten, if they ever had taken to heart, any of his many sayings concerning it. He might not be the Messiah, still he had been very dear to them, and they would anoint and embalm with loving hands and fragrant ointment the dear body which had been so cruelly broken by the hands of his enemies. The men might forsake the dead body, as they had their living Master, but not they. This is not in woman's nature to do. So, consulting only their love, they make this early journey to the tomb.

1.—**The difficulty and triumph of love.**—As they went they be-
thought them of the great stone which, according to custom, or which
they may have observed when they followed the body to the tomb, and
which would be lying over against the mouth of the sepulchre. They
knew nothing of the guard of soldiers; neither does Mark speak of
them. "Who shall roll us away the stone?" "For it was very
great." Such a difficulty occurring to men, or to any one less intent
on a labor of love, would have halted them and perhaps turned them
aside; but, woman-like and love-like, they kept on, counting on an
issue out of their difficulties "in some way or other." True love,
especially when it is mixed with faith, does not stop for obstacles or
difficulties, no matter how formidable. Love has a better logic than
reason. So they journeyed on undismayed, and lo! when they came
the stone was rolled away. We may well surmise that they were both
delighted and alarmed—delighted that their chief difficulty was re-
moved, and then instantly alarmed lest it might betoken a greater
calamity, namely, that the body had been taken away—perhaps
robbed in the night; perhaps removed by the authorities. They
hastened in quickly, to set their anxieties at rest.

2.—**The angel in the sepulchre.**—Entering in haste, they were
astonished to see a young man sitting on the shelf where the body
would have been had it been there. He was arrayed in a long white
garment. Who was he? What did his presence signify there? They
were trembling with fear and excitement. The young man, who was
no other than an angel from heaven, perhaps Gabriel again, at once
sought to quiet them. "Be not affrighted; ye seek Jesus of Nazareth
which was crucified; he is risen; he is not here; behold the place
where they laid him." What message was this? He is risen! How
that word must have thrilled through and through them! Not stolen;
not carried away by friends; but risen! Did they then remember
his words? The angel may have meant to remind them of what they
ought not to have forgotten, and to suggest to them that loving as
was their purpose and mission, they ought not to be surprised at not
finding their Lord. That they should have come with expectation of
faith rather than mere devotion of love. How closely are angels re-
lated to us! Even in nature, for they are always seen as though they
were men. They are, if not kinsmen according to nature, at least
cousins in relation to us. The servants of God and ministering
spirits to us. Angels ministered to the saints of old. They especially
acted as messengers to us concerning Jesus Christ. They announced
his incarnation to Mary; they announced his birth to the shepherds.
They ministered to him in the wilderness and in the garden; they

waited on him in the first moments of his resurrection, rolling away the stone before the door of the sepulchre, and tarried to communicate the fact of his rising to these loving and seeking women, and delivered to them his first message to his disciples. They came down to receive Jesus up into glory, and tarried behind to comfort the astonished disciples by telling them of his speedy return. Let us not think of angels as being far off and with whom we have nothing to do. They are doubtless close about, watching over and ministering in a thousand unseen ways to us; for that indeed seems to be their chief mission. Like goodness and mercy, they follow us all the days of our life.

3.—The message to the disciples.—Having, in a measure, quieted the fears of the women, the angel bade them hasten with a message from the risen Lord to his disciples. Apprised ourselves of the resurrection, it becomes our first duty to communicate it to others. The relationship which binds us to Jesus is essentially a non-selfish one. We are his to serve and obey, as well as to be saved; and the Lord's business demands haste. There was no time wasted in idle or useless questions concerning the most stupendous fact in the world's history. Another account tells us that these women were bidden to "go quickly." There was no time to be lost; the disciples must not be permitted to sink any deeper in despair than they were already plunged. The night of their distress must be dissipated by the rising joy of his resurrection; they must be arrested in their downward career of unbelief. Hence the message to them.

It is most touching and beautiful to note the special message to Peter. "Tell his disciples and Peter." Was not, then, Peter a disciple; he who had been the very foremost and chief among them? Was he now counted out of that little band of eleven? Why this specification? Surely, the reason comes quickly to us all. Peter had denied his Lord with a bitter, unbelieving, and wicked oath. He had cast himself out and off from the circle of disciples and away from his Lord. "I know not the man," he had said. True, he had bitterly repented, with tears, his fall. The Lord had broken his heart with a look as he left the palace of the high priest. What would be the state of his feelings when he heard of the Lord's resurrection? Could he, would he dare take to himself any message that was sent to the disciples in general? Surely, he would say to himself: "The Lord will not want to see me. I have cut myself off from his love. I have forfeited all claims upon his regard." True, the other disciples had forsaken him and fled at the time of his arrest, but none had so basely denied him as Peter. But the Lord knoweth them that are his. He knew that it was not

through lack of love, but through the weakness of the flesh, that Peter had denied him, and therefore he would send him a special message, lest his deep humiliation and cruel fear would deter him from coming, with the others, to the place appointed. It is most touching and blessed to think of this: that the first thought of the risen Lord was for the erring disciple; the first care of the Good Shepherd was for the strayed sheep. Peter, more than the rest, needed a special word, so above the rest he is remembered. The Good Shepherd, who loves all, has peculiar pity and compassion toward the wounded sheep. It is worthy of note, that Paul makes mention of a special and private meeting between Peter and the Lord. (I. Cor. xv, 5.) It has been beautifully suggested that this private meeting was one in which the reconciliation between the denying Peter and the forgiving Saviour was completed. But one other private interview is recorded, and that was between the Lord and his half brother James, who, until now, was not one of his disciples, but who, after the resurrection, became one, and subsequently the first pastor of the church at Jerusalem. We should learn from this to be specially compassionate, and particularly careful to restore those of the flock who have gone astray or been overtaken in a fault.

4.—The place of meeting.—"He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." Dear Galilee! that rough hill country where his home was; where the chief part of his life and the most memorable part of his public ministry had been spent—Galilee, where he had the most friends and disciples, removed, as he was, from the direct influences of the envious and vindictive priests; in Galilee, where the meeting might be quiet, and occasion no uproar or confusion. How the news would speed, and how, at the time appointed, the disciples and friends of Jesus would come, with fear and trembling, to meet the Crucified but now risen Lord! It was at that meeting that he was "seen of above five hundred brethren at once," the greater part of whom remained alive when Paul wrote his Epistle to the Corinthians. He had before spoken to them of his rising again and meeting them in Galilee. (Mark xiv, 28). The angel reminds them of this fact. No doubt it would come back to them now, and the remainder would help the difficult faith of his slow-hearted followers. How good it is to know that the things which are most staggering to our faith are the things which before have been clearly spoken of. The greatest benefit of prophecy is in its confirming power to our faith after the events. Jesus was wont to warn his disciples of coming events, so that when they came they would not overwhelm them either with surprise or fear.

II.—HOW THE NEWS WAS RECEIVED.

The artless simplicity of this narrative must forever dispel the theory that the story of his resurrection was a concocted one by his disciples. And the repeated appearances of Jesus to his disciples under so many different circumstances, must dispose of the theory that the honest belief of his disciples was founded on the wild fancies of a few enthusiastic and impressionable women. The hardness of the hearts of his disciples, the slow waking of their faith to the fact of the resurrection, disposes of any theory that rests on the assumption of invention, collusion, or mere credulity.

1.—**The trembling flight of the women.**—No wonder they went out from the presence of the angel, and from the empty sepulcher, with trembling amazement. Stunned with what they had learned, half in fear, half in an ecstasy of joy, they fled on their way to the city, to communicate the news to the disciples. Neither did they speak to any one on the way. Was ever such a message communicated and intrusted to human beings before?

2.—**The meeting with Mary.**—A comparison of Mark with the other accounts, shows that there was much confusion in these first hours. Mary seems to have lingered behind, doubting and fearing, taken up with her grief, and not now taking in the fact of the resurrection. Peter and John, getting word from the women, doubting and astonished, instead of going to Galilee, rushed to the tomb themselves, to see with their own eyes, if possible, whether such news could be true. In the meantime, Jesus meets Mary in the garden where the tomb was, and reveals himself to her, and sends her, flying with the news, after the others. Ah, blessed joy! blessed confusion of details! We linger not over the seeming discrepancies, but give our hearts fullness of joy over the main fact, that Jesus, who was crucified, is risen from the dead.

3.—**Mourning and weeping.**—What a pathetic description is here given of the effect which the news produced upon those disciples who first received it from Mary! As we have seen, John and Peter did not wait for particulars, but sprang up and ran at once to the sepulchre; but the others talked it over and “mourned and wept.” Was it not for an unspeakable joy? Their hearts could not bear it. The revulsion of feeling from the dark despair was so great, that they could only find relief in this way. The mourning was an ecstasy; the weeping was a joy. We have seen men and women bowed down under conviction of sin, and bound in chains of unbelief, and covered with the heavy darkness of sin, coming into a clear vision of Jesus, as a

Saviour, do this very thing. The first effect of their faith in Christ was seen in mourning and weeping. There is exquisite relief in this. The other expression, they "believed not for joy," is another exquisite touch of the historian, true to nature. They believed, but the joy of it was so great that they believed not; they believed, but they feared it was too good to be true. We have all had just such experiences, both in respect of earthly things and spiritual realities!

4.—**The Emmaus disciples.**—"After that, he appeared in another form to two of them." We know, from Luke's Gospel, who these two were, and the sweet details of that meeting. (xxiv, 13-35.) These two disciples, still unbelieving, had left the company at Jerusalem and started for their village home. As they journeyed, talking over these things and discussing the probabilities and the improbabilities of the truth of the women's story, with a balance of unbelief in their minds, Jesus met them, and after awhile revealed himself to them. Then they rushed back to Jerusalem, and added the weight of their testimony to that of Mary and the other women, and found that their testimony was discredited, even as they had doubted the word of the women. Our own unbelief ought to make us patient with the doubts of others. No doubt these are great things to believe; but then great things are expected of faith.

Our lesson closes with the thirteenth verse; why, we do not know. But we may read the fourteenth, even if the committee have not given it to us to study. Jesus afterward appeared to the whole company, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not the testimony of them that had seen him alive from the dead. Let us avoid such a rebuke (though a rebuke from his lips is only another declaration of his love), by giving ourselves up wholly to the testimony which God has given us in the record he has caused to be written for our comfort, our joy, and our salvation.

LESSON XXVI.

I.—REVIEW.

A review of the lessons of the present quarter based either upon the Golden Texts, or upon the facts and doctrines of the last twelve lessons, may be had for this Sunday.

II.—A TEMPERANCE LESSON.—I. Cor. viii. 4-13.

If the review is not deemed best, then the following Scripture is suggested as the basis of a Temperance Lesson:

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.—I. Cor. viii. 4-18.

III.—A MISSIONARY LESSON.—Mark xvi, 14-20.

If the last review Sunday was used either to review the regular lessons or to teach a Temperance Lesson, this Sunday might be well employed by studying the Missionary Lesson suggested by the following Scripture:

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.—Mark xvi, 14-20.



LESSON XXVII.

SAMUEL CALLED OF GOD.—I. Sam. iii, 1-14.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Then Samuel answered, *Speak; for thy servant heareth.*—I. Sam. iii, 10.

And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; that the Lord called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the Lord called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth. And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.—I. Sam. iii. 1-14.

The books from which most of our studies for the last half of this year are taken, are called by the name of Samuel, not because they were written by him, but because they record and describe his work for Israel. He may have left material from which they were compiled, but it is probable that he was not their author as we now have them.

After Moses, Samuel exercised the most important influence upon the national life of Israel. Moses, indeed, founded the nation; but Samuel consolidated and gave it consistency and such order and gov-

ernment as insured its perpetuity. The progress from Moses to Samuel was not steady. On the contrary, from the days of Joshua to Samuel there was decline. During the period of the judges, there were fitful recoveries from apostasies toward barbarism ; but, upon the whole, both the national and spiritual life of Israel were nearly lost. At this time the people were well-nigh a subject race, without much, if any, government ; a mere aggregation of fierce and warlike tribes, deficient in the skill and use of weapons of war, who were being gradually subdued by the more soldierly Philistines. As for their religious life, it is enough to say that it was not of a higher type than that represented by the two profligate and lawless sons of Eli, who had practically overridden the law of Moses and made of their office a cloak for covetousness and screen for lust. Their father, the aged Eli, appears to have been a good-natured, right-meaning, but exceedingly weak man, who allowed himself to be swayed by misguided natural affection in violation of the law of God, and even his own sense of righteousness ; so much so, that though he chided his sons, he steadily winked at their scandalous doings. It was at this point that Samuel was raised up of God to rescue his people from national extinction and restore them to a purer worship of Jehovah, by laying new foundations upon which the nation should rest ; especially in the establishment of a national system of education and the founding of an order of trained men who should be able to do the great work of teaching and interpreting the law of God, and hold themselves in a condition of prophetic receptivity for further communications of the will of God to the people. Samuel's work did not depend upon his personal energy for its continuance, but upon the institutions which he founded, viz. : national education and constitutional government. Jeremiah records God's estimate of Samuel by coupling his name with that of Moses as a most potent intercessor with him. (Jer. xv, 1.)

Never did the moral and religious, not to say the national, life of Israel seem so hopeless as at the time when our story of Samuel begins. Eli had given a ray of light to the people, but it was a fitful lamp never trimmed, and it finally went out, leaving the people in denser darkness than before, because the light in him became darkness. But there was a light coming, and from an unexpected quarter, as it ever does under the rule of God's providence. Our lesson has to do with the state of darkness then over Israel, and the rising of the new light which was to guide the people out of all their trouble, and lead them to a higher life in every way.

I.—NO OPEN VISION.

"In these days the word of the Lord was precious; there was no open vision." By this we are to understand that though there had been occasional communications of the will of God, sometimes by the angel messengers, sometimes by Urim and Thummim, and again by some "man of God" (ii, 27), there was no established order of prophets, by whom the word of God was constantly or regularly communicated to the people. Word came rarely from God to the people. This is what is meant by: "The word of God was precious." Not that it was highly esteemed, but that it was rare. For a long time the people had been in practical darkness; there was no breaking out of God's word among them. Individuals had been in fellowship with God, and the inner light of his spirit had been guiding isolated persons, as in the case of Hannah, Samuel's mother; but there was no open vision, no proclamation to the whole people, no order of prophets; the priest and the judge were the only public and official persons in Israel.

1.—The greatness of such a deprivation.—I can conceive of no greater calamity to an individual or people than that they be deprived of a clear communication of the word and will of God. For a man to be denied solar light and left in total darkness, able only feebly and painfully to grope about, deprived of all the beauty of nature and of all freedom of action which light permits, and exposed to all the dangers incident to blindness, is painful beyond measure. But this is as nothing compared to being deprived of intellectual light; that is, to having the intellect overthrown and left in mental darkness, devoid of reason. But even this is not so awful as to be deprived of spiritual light, and left without light from God concerning the world that lies beyond; the unseen and eternal spiritual verities of the universe. Israel was in this condition. There was no spiritual light shining in upon the moral nature of the people; a fitful gleam now and then, but no open vision. They were in darkness, and so went in the ways of darkness. This is a condition into which even we may come who have the word of God in our hands if, by any means, we bear ourselves so toward God that no "light breaks out of God's word" upon our souls. This is the condition of all those who "hide their faces" from him who is the light of the world, and do not see the light because they will not come to it. If we could see as God sees, the man, woman, or child who is not walking in the light of God's word, who has not a vision of God, is vastly more wretched than if he or she were blind as to natural sight and deprived of the light of reason. "This is their condemnation, that light is come into the world, and they have

loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." (John iii, 19.)

2.—**Why was there no open vision?**—Why was there a scarcity of the word of God? Such a calamity does not come upon any people without cause. The open vision was not withheld from Israel because God did not desire them to walk in the light of his word and will. He had spoken to them by Moses; again and again he had spoken to them by the Angel of the Covenant; at least, to some of them. It is not supposable that he arbitrarily left them to darkness. It is not difficult to answer this question, because the Bible is prolific in reasons why the light of God's revelation is withheld from men. (a) *Because of disobedience to the light they had.* God had given them a clear transcript of his will, telling them if they walked in his statutes he would bless them, but if they departed from his law he would curse them, or leave them to the curse of their evil ways, which comes to the same thing. From the time they entered into their land which he had promised, and given them by the hands of Moses and Joshua, they began to disobey his word, and negligently failed to possess the land as he had bidden them. The whole book of Judges is but the story of the continual tendency of the people to apostatize from his word and way. If we follow not the light we have, we get no more, and what we have becomes darkness. It was so with the heathen world. "When they knew God they glorified him not as such, but became vain in their own imaginations; and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Rom. i, 21.) Had the heathen followed the light of nature, God would have given them the light of revelation; had Israel followed the light which shone out of the law of Moses, God would have given them an open vision by which they could have walked in fullness of light to their manifest destiny. (b) *Liking not to retain God in their knowledge.* These priests (sons of Eli) liked not to retain God in their thoughts any more than did the heathen, of whom Paul wrote. To live with our faces toward God is to live away from the world and all the lusts of the flesh. The corrupt atheist says, "No God for me," because he likes not the thought of God. The movement of our affections away from God prevents us from having any more light from him, and plunges us, more and more, into the darkness of "not knowing the will of God." God will not, can not give an open vision to those who "receive not the love of the truth." (II. Thess. ii, 10.) Israel, at this time, liked not the word of God, because the love of God was not in them. No doubt, if the truth were fully known concerning those who profess that they can not believe in God, it would be found that their inability to believe is based on their unwillingness. They love not the

truth, and like not the thought of God. (c) *Because of the love of sin.* These priests (who were the type of the moral condition of all Israel) were in love with the lower half of their natures. They were in love with sin; greedy, worldly, avaricious, full of lust and violence. When once men turn away from the light which they have from God, and voluntarily put God out of their thoughts, they sink into deeper and denser darkness. Their deeds were evil—persistently and purposely evil—therefore could God not speak to them, neither could they hear him. There can be no open vision of truth to the man, woman, or child who is voluntarily living in sin; deliberately choosing to cultivate the animal and worldly side of his or her nature rather than the spiritual part. (d) *The substitution of their own wishes and opinions for God's word.* They who begin by disliking God's word and the knowledge of God, as spiritually revealed, usually end by substituting their own reason (so-called), and so professing themselves to be wise, they become fools. Israel had taken his life into his own hands and did that which seemed right in his own eyes; therefore was the open vision withheld. In our day there are those who, having adopted a system of philosophy or a theology of their own, apart from the revelation which God has given of himself in his Son, profess themselves to be unable either to understand or believe the Bible. There is in it no open vision to them. They are "the wise and prudent," from whom the word of God is hidden. (Matt xi, 25; I. Cor. i, 19-30; ii, 7-16; II. Cor. iii, 14-18.) The principle on which Israel failed of an open vision and suffered a scarcity of the word of God, is fully explained by our Lord in the reason which he gave for speaking to the people in parables (Matt. xiii, 13-17): "For whosoever hath to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts and should be converted, and I should heal them." We are not now dependent on prophets for an open vision of God's word. God has given us a complete and sure word of prophecy (II. Pet. i, 19) in his word of revelation, which is all headed up in Jesus Christ, and is spread before our eyes and hearts in the Bible. If we take heed to this word in our hearts, light will break out of it upon our souls, and we shall not be in darkness as to any thing that is needful for us to know concerning God, or necessary for the edification of our own lives. But if

we are careless of it, disobedient to it, do not like it, go in any way of sin, attempt to substitute our own dark and feeble reason for his revelation, then will there be no light for us, and we shall fall into the same condition that Israel was in at the time Samuel was raised up. Individually, we may stop the vision and close out from our minds and hearts the flood of light that is always ready to break forth from God's word to them that seek unto it, and the entrance of which giveth life as well as light. Any one of the above enumerated causes is enough to destroy for us the "open vision," and make "precious," or scarce, the word of God. The secret of Paul's great illumination of mind and heart, was in the fact that from the beginning he "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." (Acts xxvi, 19.)

II.—THE CALL OF SAMUEL.

In all God's dealings with his people, we are reminded of that blessed declaration of Paul to the Romans: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (vi, 20.) Had God left Israel to the fruit of his own wicked ways, there would have been no more open vision forever. Revelation would have ceased and man been hopelessly lost in the course of his own wicked way. Man's sin and unfaithfulness for the time being arrested the operation of God's purpose of grace; but it did not entirely frustrate it. For a time the revelation of God was dammed up like water, but presently the obstructions are swept away and it breaks forth with fresh power and larger fullness, and then flows on peacefully. Israel's sin offered a temporary hinderance to the revelation of God; but man and his sin are but temporary. Man dies and ceases from this world, but God lives on eternally. If need be, God sweeps away the wicked men who hinder his grace and corrupt his people, and then, by means of a man after his own heart, he continues his merciful purpose, as in this case toward Israel, and so, to the world. We may be sure that every stoppage of the truth, every obstacle and hinderance thrown in the way of the progress of God's grace, will be ultimately swept away and God will shine forth triumphantly. The sons of Eli corrupted Israel and hindered his word from having "free course," but God now raises up a man who will be the means of making permanent his word, and giving to Israel and to the world a completer revelation than ever before.

1.—God has his instruments of grace in reserve.—Every thing at this time was dark, but light was at hand, and would soon break forth. As it was from the beginning, so now, out of the darkness of

night the morning light would spring. After Cain came Seth; Enoch walked with God in the antediluvian days; Noah held forth the torch of revelation when the whole world was filled with darkness and violence; Abraham came forth out of the darkness of the world's idolatry; Moses was rescued and his lamp kindled to light Israel out of Egypt; Joshua snatched the falling torch from his dying hand, and held it aloft; God raised up the Judges to keep Israel from utter darkness and overthrow; now Samuel appears to scatter the darkness spread abroad by the sons of Eli; David succeeded Saul; the prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the rest—appeared in the darkest days of Israel's subsequent history; John the Baptist heralded him who came a Light to lighten every man that cometh into the world; out of the midnight darkness that covered the earth after the crucifixion of Jesus, the resurrection light broke forth and the Holy Ghost was poured into the hearts of the Apostles, who had before been prepared, and by whose ministry the Church was filled with light, and sent forth with the word of God in her hands; in the dark ages, God prepared Luther to step forth and scatter the darkness by rescuing the word of God from the oblivion into which the Church of Rome had consigned it, and so on all through the ages, God has had his reserved instruments in readiness for the moment of crisis.

The first two chapters of this book are a beautiful history of how God was beforehand with his chosen instrument, as he was in rescuing Moses in an earlier day. The boy Samuel was already in the Temple, the chosen of God. "He did not yet know the Lord." That is, though he knew him in his heart, as did not the wicked priests, yet he did not know him as a prophet to whom the Lord gives a vision and communicates his word. (v. 7.) In deeper sense than the obvious one, the lamp was going out in the Temple, but God was about to light it again by the hand of Samuel in a higher and truer sense than was done by him every morning during his ordinary ministry.

2.—God prepares and fits the instruments he has in reserve.—We know how he prepared Moses for his great work. In this story we see how he prepared Samuel: first in the heart of his sorrowful mother, who asked him of God, and consecrated him before he was ever conceived in the womb, and afterward lent him to the Lord according to her vow. (i, 20-28.) In all this, we see how Samuel was trained in the school of prayer, consecration, and practical knowledge.

3.—God calls his chosen instruments from lowly places to higher service.—He called Moses from tending sheep to be the great leader of his people; Joshua from being the servant of Moses to be-

come a great captain; Samuel from the business of opening temple doors and lighting and trimming lamps to that of the greatest judge and ruler that Israel ever had; David from the flock to the throne; most of his prophets from lowly service to the high places they occupied; his Apostles from fishing and tax-gathering; Luther from an humble convent; William Carey from the bench of a cobbler to be the founder of modern missions; Moody from a shoe store to be the greatest of modern evangelists. Indeed, we learn from the New Testament that it is his rule to choose "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and the things which are not to bring to naught the things which are, that no flesh should glory in his sight." (I. Cor. i, 27-29.)

4.—The personal fitness of God's instruments.—A casual consideration will show that all God's servants chosen for great work, were personally fit, by nature and disposition, to do the work to which he called them. We have not space to specify, but only indicate this truth as illustrated in the case of Samuel. His marvelous ability is seen in his later career; but even in his youth, as we know him now, we find him characterized by piety, obedience, industry, and docility toward those who were above him, and especially toward God, who now called him. Obeying the instructions of Eli, he lay down after the third waking, and in answer to the Lord's call uttered these memorable words: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Here was the quiet spirit, the hearing ear, and the obedient heart; ready to receive the word of God and do it, whatever it might be; and how faithfully he obeyed it, though very painful for him, the story tells. If any of God's servants, young or old, would be advanced from a low to a higher place, from a narrow to a wider field of service, let him be conspicuously obedient and useful in the place where he is, and wait on the Lord, to hear and do his word.

5.—The Lord's call to Samuel.—We learn, from the manner of the Lord's call, that he does not always call in the same way. In the first three instances Samuel only heard a voice; in the fourth he also saw a person, for the Lord came "and stood" by him and called. Sometimes in one way and sometimes in another, he calls us. Nor is it always at the first call that we clearly discern the law. We are warranted in tarrying till we are sure. Gideon asked three signs before he felt sure enough to undertake the work God appointed him to. If we are only willing and obedient, we shall surely know, sooner or later, whether it is the Lord, or a mere fancy, or delusion of Satan.

We must try the spirits, and wait until we are sure before we run, lest we run without being sent.

6.—There is much hope for our children in this story.—Samuel was but about twelve years old; just the age of Jesus when he first began to be “about his Father’s business.” We may thank God that it is ours to train our children for the Lord’s service, and if we truly “lend” them to the Lord, we may expect that he will call them into his service. We should encourage our children to hearken for God’s call, and when the call comes, either for salvation or service, put no obstacles in their way.

III.—THE REVELATION TO SAMUEL.

When the Lord did at last speak to Samuel, he made a revelation to him that should, indeed, make “both the ears of every one that heard it tingle.” That is, the revelation was one that would smite the moral sense of all with a shock like a blow upon both ears at once.

1.—Its startling character.—Samuel had never known any other order of things than those which existed at the time of his birth and during his residence in the Temple. The iniquities of the sons of Eli, no doubt, must have surprised and shocked him; but they did not seem as bad as they were, especially as he had never known any thing else, more especially as the old priest, their father, made no great matter of it. Eli did not reprove them, therefore it could not be so very bad. He loved and venerated the pious but weak old priest, and accepted the established order of things. The best of people get wonted to the most deplorable condition of the Church and kingdom, until God startles them with a revelation. God must set sin before our eyes before we can know it in all its enormity. Now God clearly points out to Samuel the iniquity of the priests, and the sin of Eli, in that he did not reprove them by stripping them of their priestly robes, which they had polluted, and turning them out of the office which they had dishonored. We, too, are surrounded with many things that have grown up about us, as vile and disgraceful in their way as was the conduct of the sons of Eli. They are tolerated and winked at, albeit they may be sighed over, by good men. It was not till God aroused this nation by the most fearful war of all times, that we saw the full enormity of slavery, and swept it away by a bloody blow. It may be that he will yet have to do something like that to sweep away the bestial institution of polygamy in Utah; perhaps some dreadful calamity will have to come before this people understand the frightful crime of the liquor traffic, which is dishonoring our land and destroying thousands. There are

other wickednesses in high places, and even in the Church, which we are tolerating because the evil has grown chronic. God will startle us with a revelation that will make both our ears tingle some day if we do not reprove the sins that are about us.

2.—The heavy judgment.—Sometimes because the wickedness of men is allowed to go on, we are disposed to think that God does not see or care. But we may be sure that judgment is ripening as fast as sin is. Sooner or later every sin will be brought to judgment, and it will be heavy in proportion to the iniquity of it. To wink at or to fail to reprove sin, is to be equally guilty with those who commit it. Not only were the two sons of Eli cut off ; but the hand of God was also against Eli and his house.

3.—There are some sins which can not be purged.—It was now too late for Eli and his sons, by confession and sacrifice, to turn away the punishment denounced against them. God is patient with sinners ; but they may go so far that nothing remains but a fearful looking forward to judgment and fiery indignation which will devour them. If we have sinned or are sinning, let us repent and mend our ways before it is too late. Christians are no more exempt from this law of judgment than others. Indeed, God hates sin in his people more than in any one else.

LESSON XXVIII.

THE SORROWFUL DEATH OF ELI.—I. Sam. iv, 1-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.—I. Sam. iii, 13.

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer : and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel : and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines : and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to day before the Philistines ? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim : and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews ? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid ; for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us ! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us ! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods ? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you : quit yourselves like men, and fight. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent : and there was a very great slaughter ; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken ; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the way side watching : for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult ? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old ; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son ? And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is

taken. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died : for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.—I. Sam. iv, 1-18.

The first sentence in this lesson belongs to the last verse of the third chapter, and announces that Samuel was now recognized by all Israel as God's prophet. Samuel was called when he was yet a child, but did not come into the first place of official power until the death of Eli.

The chief lesson to be gathered from the subject of our study to-day, is that God is over all the affairs of men and nations, and in his providence rules and directs them according to his purposes, and that without interference with the perfect freedom of man. Some years before, God had sent a man to Eli (ii, 27-35) to forewarn him that Israel should suffer defeat and disaster while he yet lived, and that his two apostate sons should die in one day. Later he confirmed this prophecy by the mouth of the young prophet Samuel, declaring that he would make a full end of the matter when he began. (iii, 12, 13.) Now it has come to pass by means of this mighty battle and terrible defeat of Israel. God is as surely ruling and overruling in all the actions of men and nations to accomplish his purposes now as then. There can be no doubt that the will of God is being wrought out in the triumphs and disasters of national life in all time. The laws by which men are governed are uniform. They are often slow and subtle in operation, and it requires that the whole life of a people be known before we can see the sure working of the laws that determine success or ruin. It is an advantage to the world that in sacred history we have revealed to us in concrete form, the principles on which God rules men. The account of the disaster that fell upon Israel in this instance, furnishes us with much instruction, which it will profit us to consider, as the principles involved bear upon both national and individual life.

I.—ISRAEL'S STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY.

It is probable that, in the early days of Eli's judgeship, he had, in a measure, delivered Israel from the bondage of the Philistines; but that in later years the Philistines had been slowly regaining their supremacy, and were about to rivet the chains of subjection firmly upon the Israelites. The raising up of Samuel and the restoration of the long-lost "open vision" through him, had encouraged the elders of Israel to hope that they might throw off the yoke of bondage and

regain their entire freedom. Samuel was to them a visible sign that God was with them. They made the mistake of supposing that the favor of God would be restored to the nation because a prophet had arisen among them, altogether without reference to any amendment of life and return to God on their part. They were still corrupt and far from God, both in heart and life. This was their supreme mistake. The raising up of a prophet was meant to be an encouragement that if they heard the voice of the prophet and returned to the Lord by repentance, his favor would be restored to them, but it gave no warrant that the mere presence of a prophet would bring that favor. The advent of a prophet was always the sure sign of the low moral condition of the people, and was in itself an exhortation to repentance.

1.—The lawful desire of Israel for freedom.—It was perfectly natural for Israel to desire to throw off the yoke of the Philistines and regain their freedom; lawful for them to reason that this was the will of God; proper for them to decide that they must themselves strike a blow for their own deliverance; and so they took the initiative in this battle by challenging the Philistines—or, rather, they arose in rebellion against their heathen oppressors. It is right for men to desire the highest and best that God has in store for them, to say: "It is the will of God that we shall be saved," and proper to conclude that their salvation must come in connection with their own efforts. But this is not the whole truth. It is the will of God that all men shall be saved; but he has his own method of salvation, and there are moral conditions which must be taken into account. For instance, there is no other way of salvation than through faith in Christ; but repentance and amendment of life is an essential moral condition of the forth-putting of God's power to that end. To neglect these is to miss of salvation, however we may appeal to the will of God and exert our own strength. Israel, in this case, trusted to the righteousness of their cause and their own exertions, forgetting that they were in no moral condition either to achieve or enjoy their deliverance.

2.—The elders' complaint.—Having gone forth presumptuously to battle (for there is no evidence that they were directed to inaugurate this struggle either by Eli or Samuel, or that they made any inquiry of God concerning his will), they suffered an immediate, though not an overwhelming, defeat. They were driven back upon their first line of defense with a loss of four thousand men. This defeat filled them with consternation, for they had counted upon a signal victory. The Elders of Israel said: "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us this day before the Philistines?" They appear to have placed the blame upon the

Lord, as though he had been unfaithful to them. It is common, when things go wrong with us, to complain against God, as though he were unfair to us. It is true that the Israelites, in a sense, were trusting in or counting upon the Lord for deliverance through their efforts, but they nevertheless failed. We often make efforts, depending upon the Lord for success, but forgetting to inquire whether our venture is in accordance with his will, or whether we are in a moral condition to warrant the success of our undertaking. Further along we shall be able to answer, in a measure, this question of the elders.

3.—The elders' proposition.—In seeking for the cause of defeat, it did not occur to them to look into their own hearts or lives. There was no confession of sin, no acknowledgement of all their past apostasies and wickedness; but they reasoned that in not bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the army (as Joshua did at Jericho), perhaps they had failed of God's presence. This was mere superstition. The ark was the visible symbol of God's presence with his people, but they erred in supposing that it possessed, in itself, divine power. The ark, without the favor of God, was of no more help to them than any other wooden box would have been. There was no more potency in the ark itself than there is in the word of God without the quickening agency of the Holy Spirit; hence the utter worthlessness of a mere sacramental faith. Some men turn to baptism, the Lord's Supper, church membership, forms of prayer, and conventional methods of devotion for salvation; but all these are solemn mockeries unless God be present in them to bless and make them efficient. The elders might, indeed, by an act of their will and by mere human strength, bring the ark into the camp, but they could not, by this means, bring God into the camp. In fact, their act exposed the moral blindness of their hearts. They sought not unto God himself, but to a mere outward symbol. Had they brought broken spirits and contrite hearts to God instead of the ark to their camp, they would have succeeded, as they did later under Samuel's leadership. (vii, 1-7.) We may learn from this that no act of religion, no amount of formal worship, will bring God to us in time of need if our hearts are not given up to him, or if we cherish sin and refuse to put away our iniquities. (II. Cor. vii, 14; Is. lix, 1, 2.) Therefore did David pray: "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Ps. li.) Not only was the dependence of the Israelites upon the ark vain, but their confidence was equally vain when they all "shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." It was not with

them as with those who marched around the walls of Jericho, the ark in their midst, when they shouted until the walls fell down. Then God was with them, and the ark there, because he had bidden them take it. Here we see the vanity of imitation in the Lord's work. A present following of the Lord, not a vain imitation of the past performances of others, is what we need. The Israelites also took Phinehas and Hophni with the ark, perhaps in imitation of that time when Moses sent another Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the priest, to go with the tribes to war against the Midianites, with the "holy instruments and the trumpet to blow, in his hand." (Numbers xxxi, 6.) The presence of these two profligate priests was an indication of the moral condition of the people. How could they have expected God to go with the ark in company with such priests; how could they hope that God would come to them so long as they tolerated these base men in the chief offices of religion? Their shout was that of vain presumption rather than of humble faith.

4.—The fear and courage of the Philistines.—When the Philistines heard the mighty shout of the Israelites and knew that the ark was with them, they were, for a moment, smitten with a panic of superstitious fear. It was their own custom to carry their gods to battle with them. They were acquainted with the past history of Israel's victories, but they had never known them to bring the ark into battle. To them the ark was God. They were as ignorant of the truth that God is not confined to his symbols as the Israelites seem to have been; therefore they supposed that an overwhelming defeat was in store for them. Their leaders, however, plucked up courage to dare and do the uttermost. Their liberties were at stake. If Israel prevailed, the two nations must change places. There are two lessons from this incident: (a) *The fears of the Philistines on account of the ark were as groundless as the confidence of Israel.* The ark could do them no harm without God's presence, any more than it could do Israel good. A superstitious fear is as vain as a superstitious confidence. Let us have neither fear nor confidence, except as it is associated with God himself. (b) *The courage of the Philistines in this case was, no doubt, as much due to the subtle agency of God, as their fears were at other times.* It suited God's purpose that the Philistines should overcome their fears which, at other times, would have sent them pell-mell in panic, therefore were they courageous. It is ever so:

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

II.—ISRAEL'S DEFEAT.

The outcome of this battle was an overwhelming and crushing defeat of Israel.

1.—The completeness of the defeat.—Israel was thoroughly discomfited. The rout was a disastrous one. Thirty thousand men fell in battle and the rest fled, each to his home, as best he could. If the supremacy of the Philistines was complete before, the permanency of it seemed certain now. The most disastrous event to Israel was the loss of the ark. They had always associated the presence of God among them with the ark. That was taken, and it must now seem to them as if God himself had been overthrown in battle with the gods of the heathen. The cry of the wife of Phinehas must have voiced the conviction and despair of Israel when she called her child, in memory of this awful day, "Ichabod." "The glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God is taken." (vs. 22). The death on the field of battle of the two sons of Eli, and the subsequent tragic and pitiful death of the old judge, consummated the day's disaster.

2.—The causes of the defeat.—They were both apparent and concealed. To the outward eye, it was due to the greater courage, better discipline, and superior arms of the Philistines; but the discerning spirit will attribute it to other causes. (a) *God's hand was in it.* He had before prophesied the overthrow of Eli and his house, because of their sins, and because it was needful that Israel should be taught a lesson concerning their moral relations to their God. God had "begun and had made a full end," as he had declared to Samuel. We must never leave God out of account in attempting to ascertain the underlying causes of any event that affects our lives. Either by direction or permission of him, all things come to pass. (b) *The moral weakness of the Israelites.* It is possible that Israel was, physically, weaker than the Philistines; but time and again their inferiority in arms, numbers, and discipline had counted nothing against them in battle. When God fought for them, a handful of three hundred men was enough to scatter the hosts of their enemies; but here it is plainly seen that their weakness was in lack of moral conformity to the will of God. However good our cause, however heroic our courage, if we are out of harmony with God, if we are not acting in conformity with the moral as well as physical laws involved in the effort, we are sure to suffer defeat. For Israel to have triumphed over the Philistines and regained their liberty while in apostasy from God, would have been the overthrow of all moral government. Henceforth, righteousness would have counted for nothing with God's people. It is better for God's

people, in every age, that the wicked should triumph over them when they are not right with God than that, being out of fellowship with him, they should succeed in their enterprises. God can not favor unrighteousness in his people under any circumstances. Better that Philistia triumph under these conditions than that Israel go free of the hateful foreign bondage. God's victory will come later in freeing them from subjection to sin and idolatry.

3.—The end of the defeat.—What seemed to the eye a disastrous defeat was, according to the purpose of God, as seen later, a glorious victory. Their defeat brought with it humiliation and repentance. The loss of the ark aroused the conscience of the nation, and taught them that their strength was in personal and national righteousness as well as the justice of their cause; that their security was in God rather than in signs and symbols; that theirs was a life founded on faith and confidence in the living God, and not in superstitions such as influenced their heathen neighbors and enemies.

III.—THE DEATH OF ELI.

We can not consider the tragic and pathetic death of this aged judge of Israel without deepest sorrow. There is no doubt that, at heart, he was a good and God-fearing man, while, at the same time, he was weak in his affection for his children. This was his great fault. He saw the evil in them, and deplored it, but had not sufficient strength of character to boldly denounce and strictly punish it. With him the indulgent love of children was greater than loyalty to God. In view of our own weaknesses, we must not judge him too harshly. God judged him, and we must accept that judgment. Let us now look at some of the good points in his character and career.

1.—He judged Israel forty years.—While we have almost no record of his younger days and early achievements, there is abundant collateral evidence that he had greatly elevated his people and wisely governed them up to the time when age overtook him and human weakness, in respect of his children, gained control over his sense of righteousness. He both knew and loved the good, and he perceived and hated, though he did not sternly check, the evil.

2.—He was jealous for the honor of God and the holy cause.—When his sons, without his consent, took the ark of God from Shiloh, he went out by the wayside and sat where he might hear the first report of the battle. "He trembled for the ark of God." This showed where his anxiety really was—not so much for his sons as for the ark.

3.—He was overwhelmed with sorrow at the loss of the ark.—

Not a word of lamentation for the death of his sons, but his heart, as well as his neck, broke when he heard of this supreme calamity. "The poor old man reaped in pain and death the reward of his sinful weakness; but while gathering the bitter fruit, he showed his profound interest in the honor and glory of Jehovah, by being so sensitive to the reproach brought on the sacred name," that he could live no longer after the "glory of God was departed" with the ark.

4.—We may learn these two lessons.—(a) *The good in a man's life may be neutralized by a single weakness.* It is not enough to be right at heart, to be distinguished for personal goodness; one must be true to the trust consigned to him; not suffering others to do wrong where he would not. (b) *That the good in a man's life will not atone for the evil.* Eli was, at heart, a good man; his own life was pure, and as toward God, faithful; but he winked at sin in his sons, and failed to glorify God in sternly dealing with their sins. Therefore, God punished him. He did not deny the good, but punished the evil. He did not balance the good over against the evil. Our good deeds and our evil stand not together, but apart—either to be judged by themselves.

LESSON XXIX.

SAMUEL THE REFORMER.—I. Sam. vii, 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Cease to do evil; learn to do well.—Isa. i, 16, 17.

And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord. And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines and smote them, until they came under Bethcar. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.—I. Sam. vii, 1-12.

The Philistines had routed Israel, and taken the ark of God, but they had not defeated God, nor broken his purpose of grace toward his people. God, it is true, did not go with the ark to help Israel when they wickedly carried it, attended by the vile priests, into the midst of their camp; but when the Philistines took the ark and presumptuously laid it up in the temple of Dagon, their idol, as a trophy of war, then the Lord joined himself to it again, and it became an instrument to afflict the enemies of his people. First, he caused their idol to topple over and break in pieces before it. A fit prophecy of the

fall of all idolatry before the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the anti-type of the ark. Then he afflicted them in their land, and in their persons, from city to city, until, in terror, they sent back the ark to the Israelites with a trespass offering, hoping thereby to propitiate Jehovah for their sacrilege. (See chapters v and vi.) The ark was received with great joy by a portion of the men of Israel, but their reverence was not above their curiosity, and they profanely looked into it and brought upon themselves an awful chastisement from the Lord. Finally, the men of Kirjath came and fetched the ark to the house of Abinadab, in the hill, and placed it in the charge of Eleazar. For twenty years it remained there in retirement. No priest ministered; no sacrifices were offered. It was simply and reverently kept there. The evil and apostate generation of priests must die out, and the nation be recovered to God, before the public worship of Jehovah could be restored. Nevertheless, the miraculous way in which the Lord afflicted the Philistines and restored the ark; the severity with which he chastised the unhallowed curiosity of the men who looked into it, and now the fact that it was quietly resting (though in retirement) in the land of Israel again, was a pledge, at least to Samuel, that the Lord had not utterly forsaken his people, but was waiting for them to return to him, that he might again return to them with blessings. Our lesson is a suggestive one, and records the repentance and return of Israel to the Lord, and their deliverance out of the hand of the Philistines.

I—THE REPENTANCE OF ISRAEL.

For twenty years after the defeat of Israel and the loss of the ark, recorded in the fourth chapter, the heavy yoke of the Philistines had been pressed yet more heavily upon them. How complete was the subjection of Israel, may be seen by a reference to chapter xiii, 19-22. They were now so reduced, that there was not allowed them so much as a smith, who might sharpen their plows and agricultural implements. They must resort to heathen smiths, lest they should make themselves weapons of war. Even when Saul came to the throne, there was not a single weapon of war in the hand of an Israelite except his own and Jonathan's. In the meantime most of the people had sunk into the wretched idolatry of the Philistines, and worshiped Baal and Ashtaroth; the others were utterly in despair, and had given up hope. For twenty years there had been no public worship in the land. They were a subject people, both physically and morally. Nevertheless, Samuel was among them, and his constant, though secret ministry was about to effect a revival which would result in their re-

pentance and deliverance. It is full of encouragement to us to know that, low and degraded as Israel had become, there was yet a spark of grace left in their hearts, even as in the heart of the worst backslider who has ever really known the Lord. It was upon this latent spark of religious life that Samuel blew until he rekindled the flame of life. We ought to be encouraged to hope in the worst state of the Church and for the most abandoned backslider. It is interesting and profitable to follow the steps which led up to the recovery of this apostate and stricken nation.

1.—**Samuel's secret ministry among the people.**—We say secret ministry, for there is every reason to believe that the Philistines would not have tolerated any open assembly among them or any public preaching by Samuel, the whole trend of whose influence would be to rouse them to throw off the hated yoke. No return to God effected by his means could result in any thing less than that. A revival of their allegiance to God meant the overthrow of Philistia. We can fancy, and that in perfect accord with the history, the outlines of which we have, Samuel passing secretly from town to town and from house to house, not preaching a crusade against the Philistines, but preaching repentance toward God; setting before the people the great fact that their lost blessings could only be restored by a heartfelt return to God, at the same time pointing out to them the sins of their past lives, and explaining that the cause of their defeat and present subjection was not so much their physical weakness or lack of courage, or the superior strength of the Philistines, as their moral weakness. Let us look at the points of Samuel's ministry. (a) *He preached the word of God.* He did not have to get a new revelation, but he set before them, in the power of the Holy Ghost, the word of God already proclaimed. (See Deut. xxx, 1-10, c. f.) Every true revival must begin by a re-study of God's word. "Preach the word," is the best direction to heed in order to recover the people of God to spiritual life. It is a fire and hammer and a two-edged sword that pierces the heart, searches the spirit, and discerns the thoughts. This preaching of Samuel wrought repentance. First here one and then there one, until a vast majority of the people came to see the awful spiritual condition in which they were, and throughout the land there was a "lamentation after the Lord" (vs. 2), that is, a casting of themselves down before the Lord and a calling upon him to return and save them both by forgiveness and deliverance. (Read carefully these Scriptures in illustration of this great national lament: II. Chron. vii. 14; Jer. xxix, 12; Zech. xi, 11-14.) When the people are in this attitude of heart toward God, their deliverance is near. (b) *He put their repentance to the test,* "If ye do return unto the

Lord," then put away your idols. This is the test of true repentance and conversion. To acknowledge sin and not to forsake it, is to mock God and proclaim one's own insincerity. The highest praise Paul had for the Thessalonians was that, under the preaching of the Gospel, "they turned from their idols to serve the living God." Idol-worship is not confined to pagans; it is not confined to the worship of images; it is that attachment to other things and confidence in them which takes the heart away from God. Hence we read that "covetousness," or the love of money, is "idolatry." Whatever comes between us and God to hinder the full and free flow of our love and confidence toward him is an idol, and must be put away. "The wicked must forsake his way," whatever that way is, if he will really return unto the Lord. (c) "*And prepare your hearts unto the Lord.*" It was not enough to turn from idols; they must give themselves earnestly and heartily to a hearing and a doing of God's word. "Sin is most effectually broken off by righteousness (Dan. iv, 27); an old affection is most effectually expelled by a new one." If the devil is cast out, he will come again and bring a horde of others with him (Matt. xii, 43), unless the heart out of which the devil has been cast is occupied by God. This return to the Lord must be entire. "And serve him only." We may not compromise with sin. God will not have a divided heart. All or nothing. If any man love father or mother, or wife or children, or houses or land more than Christ, he is not worthy to be his disciple. A solemn consecration of themselves and all they had to the Lord was what Samuel taught them; and this is what the word of the Lord teaches us. Upon these moral conditions the prophet assured the people that the Lord would "deliver them out of the hands of the Philistines." We learn, from verse 4, that the "children of Israel did put away Baal and Ashteroth, and served the Lord only." What a time of revival this must have been! All over the land there was a breaking of idols and hewing down of groves and destruction of temples. The hearts of the people were once more right with God; they were virtually restored. Now will God work wonders for them again, and pour out his blessings upon them. So, if we have lost favor with the Lord and are captive to the world, will he restore us in like manner.

2.—The summons to Mizpeh.—The heart repentance was complete. The idols were thrown down and abandoned. The abominations of the Philistines were sacrificed before their eyes. The time of secret return had passed. Now must the open confession of Israel be made and their separation from the heathen proclaimed. Of course, the Philistines would understand what this revival meant. If Israel

had simply stayed at home and endeavored quietly to walk with God, their enemies would have come upon them in detail and carried them captive again, or so intimidated them that they could not serve the Lord; therefore, at a preconcerted signal, Samuel summoned the people to meet him in Mizpeh. This was a high hill some distance from Jerusalem, said to be about five hundred feet above the high table-land, which was two thousand feet above the level of the sea. The gathering of the people there in great numbers was their open and public declaration to the Philistines that they repudiated their dominion and returned to the Lord. God requires for our good and spiritual safety that every one who names the name of the Lord shall openly proclaim it and take a public stand against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We may not, we can not be, secret Christians. "If any man is ashamed to confess me before men, of him will I be ashamed before my Father and his angels." How the children of Israel responded, is told in the story. Having gathered themselves together on this high place, in sight of the whole surrounding country, they inaugurated a public and solemn service, in which their return to the Lord was symbolized and openly proclaimed.

(a) *"They poured out water before the Lord."* This act had a double meaning. First, it was meant to testify to their humble penitence and sense of personal weakness. It was also a solemn declaration that their word or vow of consecration had gone forth, not to be retracted, like water poured on the ground, which could not be gathered up. This is said to have been a custom among Easterns to signify an oath.

(b) *They held a solemn fast that day.* This was in accordance with a custom prescribed for observance on the great day of Atonement (Lev. xvi, 29, 31), and signified their deep humiliation on account of their sins, which is the true attitude to be taken when coming back to God through atonement.

(c) *They made confession with their lips of their sin.* "We have sinned against the Lord." This was a great day in Israel. Not for a generation had the people been thus humbly at the feet of Jehovah, their God. The reconciliation was complete, and so was their restoration to the divine favor.

(d) *They solemnly and officially recognized Samuel as their judge.* He had been their prophet, and as such guiding them in their spiritual life. Samuel was not a warrior in the proper sense of the word; but now this humbled and restored people were in a mood to have one lead them whose weapons were not carnal but spiritual. So Samuel judged Israel that day. That is, he took the supreme, spiritual, civil, and military command, to direct them in each of these departments of their national life.

III.—ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE.

Their deliverance was nigh, but not yet accomplished; that is, their deliverance from the hands of the Philistines. They were delivered from sin, their greatest enemy, and it was now only a question of a little time when they should see their implacable foes, who had domineered over them for a generation, put to an utter rout before them. Note the progress of events in connection with their deliverance.

1.—It was preceded by the anger of the Philistines.—It was not to be supposed that the Philistines would calmly allow the Israelites to throw off the yoke in this way. They had insulted and cast out their gods—they had returned to the Lord. So they went up against them. They would scatter these feeble Hebrews gathered on that hill without arms, and put down the revolt with a high hand. It is not to be expected that the enemy of our souls will allow us to go free without a struggle for our recovery to the ways of sin and death. Every convert and returning backslider may expect that his old enemies will come up against him.

2.—The fear of Israel.—“And when they heard of the movement of the Philistines they were afraid.” And, humanly speaking, they had good cause to be. They were helpless against their cruel and warlike masters. What could they do against the armed host now moving against them? It is even so with us who have taken the Lord's part and come out from the world. The trinity of evil against us is a mighty one. If we had only our own might to rely upon, there would be no hope for us. Our natural man trembles at the sight, but the spiritual man looks away to God for strength.

3.—They cry unto the Lord.—“Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us,” they said to Samuel. What a contrast between their attitude now and twenty years ago! Then they presumptuously sought to throw off their yoke without prayer or taking counsel of God. They superstitiously sent for the ark. Now they stand still and cry unto God and wait for his deliverance. In quietness and confidence their strength was to be found now.

4.—Samuel intercedes for them.—In answer to their petition, Samuel takes a young lamb and offers it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord and makes intercessory prayer for them. In effect he says to the Lord: “Behold, this people are now wholly thine; they come back to thee. They give themselves without reserve. They are now thy people; and, thou, Lord, must defend them and save them out of the hands of their enemies, according to thy word.” This prayer is not recorded, but the whole burnt offering, under these circum-

stances, means that. When we are a whole burnt offering to the Lord, then may we with confidence appeal to the assured intercession of our mediating Saviour.

5.—The Lord answered Samuel.—Of course. When we are so before the Lord that he can answer—that is, when our sins and iniquities no longer separate between us and him—then it is manifest that his ear is neither heavy nor his arm shortened. “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee.” This is God’s promise, conditioned upon our hearty turning unto him. Many people who are in trouble cry unto the Lord, and do not get heard, because they are living in sin, and for the Lord to answer them and send them deliverance without their turning away from their sin would be to make him the minister of sin.

6.—The defeat of the Philistines.—While Samuel was praying, the host of the Philistines were seen marching against them. Humanly speaking, there was no help for them. Their destruction was certain, according to sight. But God has resources of which neither his saints nor his enemies know. Now will the Lord deliver. “And the Lord thundered upon the Philistines, with a great thunder, and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel.” Alarmed at this unusual occurrence, and being right in their superstition for once, they interpreted this dreadful thunder to be the sign of the presence of God among his people, and they were seized with a sudden panic and fled before Israel. Before, when the people shouted with a mighty shout until the earth rang again, when the ark was brought among them, the Philistines were affrighted, but recovered their courage. God was not with Israel then; but now God was with them, and he did nothing to strengthen the courage of the Philistines, but let it run out of them like water. As the enemy fled, Israel pursued, practically unarmed, except with a few agricultural implements, and yet they smote them and drove them from the borders of their land. So completely were the Philistines beaten and subdued, that they came no more into the coasts of Israel. (vs. 23.) Thus does the Lord deliver his people when they are sheltered under the shadow of his wing.

IV.—ISRAEL'S STONE OF MEMORIAL.

After the battle, which took place on the same spot where they were so signally defeated twenty years ago, Samuel took a great stone and set it up and called it Ebenezer, that is, “stone of help,” and said: “Hitherto the Lord hath helped us.” This word carries with it more than one meaning.

1.—It is retrospective.—It tells the story of past help, that is, of the help that had just been given. In this victory there is the full recognition that it was by the help of God, and not by their own might, that they had won this battle and delivered their land from the dominion of the enemy. Let us so erect memorial stones to the Lord in grateful recognition of his help in all our past lives.

2.—It was prospective.—All the scholars tell us that there is a future sense in the word as well. It not only acknowledges past help, but anticipates future need, and confidently counts on the help given in the past to be present in the future. In this we see a spirit of dependence. We may reason from the past to the future, but our confidence for the future must be based on the help of him who in the past has not suffered us to be overthrown. The Christian's life is bound up in God, and only he can say of the past, the present, and the future: "But we have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver. (II. Cor. ix, 10.)

LESSON XXX.

ISRAEL ASKING FOR A KING.—I. Sam. viii, 4-20.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.—I. Sam. viii, 19.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto me. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.—I. Sam. viii, 4-20.

Hitherto we have had to do with the training of Samuel and the development in him of those high spiritual and personal qualities which enabled him to stand, not only as the first of the great order of prophets, but as the founder of it. The rest of this book has to do with the establishment of the kingdom under Saul. Samuel lives through it all and until David, the true Messianic king, is firmly placed on the

throne. There are in our present and subsequent lessons in this book the unfolding of some of the deepest truths in God's word. The raising up of a king to rule Israel, is in accordance with the divine plan, which foreshadows in that office the culminating point to be attained and accomplished by the coming of Messiah himself. In Aaron the priesthood of Messiah is fully set forth; in Samuel, the prophetic, or teaching office of Messiah is set forth; and in the king which God had in his purpose for Israel, the Kingship of Christ was to be set forth. The premature demand of the elders for a king was a human frustration of God's plan, and yet one which God overruled for his glory. We are again and again taught in God's word, which records both his purpose and direct actings and the free actings of men, that "there are spheres of action in which God allows men to take their choice of the methods by which his purposes are to be wrought out." In this case we have the evil choice of Israel, made in pride and willfulness, confirmed by God, though under protest; the subsequent consequences of which are to be seen in the calamities which they thus brought upon themselves, though the purpose of God survived their sin and folly, and his glory and the good of his people were and are yet to be finally seen. There are deep lessons for the individual as well as the church life of his people to be discovered here, and we are happy, indeed, if we search them out and heed them.

That grace and goodness does not run in the blood, is clearly seen in the corrupt characters of Samuel's two sons. They seem not to have been lewd and profligate, as were Eli's sons, but arbitrary and venial. Yet we have no reason to believe that they were so at the connivance of Samuel. His work called him all over the land, and his sons, without his knowledge, abused their office in his absence. This, however, only belongs to our lesson incidentally.

I—ISRAEL DEMANDS A KING.

The idea of a king was not altogether a new one to Israel. That the time would come when they should set a king over them—one whom they should choose with the entire consent and sanction of God, who should stand for him and represent the Messianic office as Aaron and Samuel represented the priestly and prophetic office, was clearly set forth in the time of Moses. (Compare Deut. xvii, 15-17, with Deut. xviii, 15-18, and Ex. xxviii, 1.) In these three passages we have the clear foreshadowing of the Messianic character of him who afterward fulfilled all these offices in his own person; the idea of which was to be kept before Israel in the divinely-chosen men who should typify him in

the earthly and temporary administration of the spiritual government of Israel. The time, however, for the coming of the king had not yet arrived. Once before Israel had essayed the business of king-making, but the outcome of it was so horrible and disastrous, that for almost a century there had been no revival of it. (See the history of Abimelech, Judges ix, 22.) But now the thought of a king was revived among the elders of Israel, and after much conference and what we may call loyal conspiracy, they appear before Samuel and make their demand. We say a loyal conspiracy, for the reason that they made no plan to overthrow the government under Samuel by force, but sought to effect a peaceful revolution and set up a kingdom with the consent of Samuel himself. In their method, at least, the elders were to be commended.

1.—The occasion of their demand.—When men are set on a purpose, they can always find an occasion which will furnish them with reasons for their course, however false and insufficient they may be. It was so in this case. We should always weigh our motives and the reasons which we give to ourselves for any course we may take before we commit ourselves to it, so that we may be sure that we are right and not guided by passion. Let us look at the arguments with which the elders plied Samuel. (a) "*Behold, thou art old.*" This was but a false pretense, for, at most, Samuel was not more than sixty years of age, and subsequent history shows that for forty years and more he continued to serve the Lord faithfully and ably in the prophet's office, and the wisdom and skill, the firmness and equity with which he managed this delicate business, showed him to be a man possessed of the highest ability, both mentally and physically. Besides, this allegation was most ungrateful. If he was old, he has grown old in their service, and as yet had shown no evidence of decaying powers. It is too often the case that this false pretense has covered a corrupt and sinful desire on the part of ambitious officers and men among God's people to get rid of old and faithful servants and ministers, in order to bring in a new reign that shall more exactly meet their worldly and ambitious purposes. One of the worst features of modern church life is the disposition to turn out the old and experienced ministers and substitute in their stead young, untried, and inexperienced men. Bring forward the young men; certainly; but hold on to the old and tried servants of God, as long as God shall give them strength to minister his Gospel. (b) "*Thy sons walk not in thy ways.*" This was no doubt true; but they did not allege that Samuel was in any way a party to their wickedness. Had this been a real grievance, they would have simply made the charges against them and demanded their removal

from office. Surely, if they could count on Samuel to abdicate the government himself in favor of a king, they could much more have trusted him, whose character was so transparently true to God, to have removed from their office even his own sons, when it became clear that they were no more worthy. (c) "*To judge us like the nations; and to fight our battles for us.*" (vs. 5, 19, 20.) It is probable that the elders were somewhat alarmed at the renewed encroachments of the Philistines, for they had again put some garrisons in the land. But had not Samuel delivered them out of far worse conditions? Was not the Lord with him; and could not he again deliver them from their enemies? Why ask a king when they had a judge who had hitherto done all that a king could possibly do in this respect? No; it is perfectly clear that these were not the real reasons that inspired their action.

2.—The real reasons for their demand.—We find these reasons partly in their own words and partly in the words of God to Samuel. (a) *Their hearts were turned away from the Lord.* "They have rejected me that I should not reign over them." "According to all the works which they have done since the day I brought them up out of Egypt unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods; so do they now." Here is the revelation of the true reason. Their hearts were turned away from God. They did not desire a king in order that they might develop the spiritual and theocratic purpose of God. They were weary of God and his way. Other gods had possessed their hearts, and so their thoughts were turned to the ways of the nations around them, with whom they really had more sympathy than they had with God. Worldliness, when it creeps into our hearts, makes us weary of God and his ways, and creates in us desires for a change of our ways from his ways. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (I. John ii, 11.) (b) *They were proud, and desired to be like the nations around them.* God's government was a simple and unostentatious one. They saw the nations about them with their kings, and, as they thought, with their more stable government. With their pomp and circumstance, and in the pride of their hearts, they wanted to be like them. Therefore, they unconsciously revealed their true thought in these words: "That we also may be like all the nations." (vs. 22.) How often do individual Christians, and congregations of the Lord, do and desire after this fashion. We desire to live like the world, and to have our churches so ordered that we also may be like the organizations of the world. We weary of spirituality and simplicity, and seek after worldly conformity and depend on worldly power.

3.—The grief and displeasure of Samuel.—It was but natural that Samuel should feel himself personally hurt that these elders should desire to turn him aside for another ruler. He was but human, and must have felt it keenly. The thing could not but “displease Samuel.” He had not deserved it at their hands. Nevertheless, we are constrained that Samuel’s displeasure, though not devoid of personal feeling, was grounded on higher motives than those which affected him personally. He saw through the hollow pretenses of these elders, and saw that they were actuated by motives that were alike unworthy of the people of God and dishonoring to them. He doubtless, also, foresaw what trouble they were about to bring upon themselves. A great-hearted and true-hearted servant of God, he was concerned for his nation more than for himself. They had not sought unto God themselves about it; they did not now come with a proposition to Samuel that he should make inquiry of God concerning the matter. They had acted upon their own desires, and left God out of their thoughts altogether. All these things grieved and displeased Samuel. How differently his spirit shows from theirs! Instead of openly and angrily resenting the affront to himself and rebuking the sin which he saw in their proposition against God, like the good man he was, “He prayed unto the Lord.” This is the true refuge of the spiritual man. He would not, in such a case, “lean unto his own understanding.” He petitioned the Lord on his own behalf, and he prayed, no doubt, for wisdom to guide him in this delicate and difficult crisis. Nor did he pray in vain; for the Lord comforted his servant by pointing out to him that he himself, rather than his servant, was the one whom Israel had affronted and rejected. If Samuel was rejected, so was the Lord. Indeed, Samuel’s rejection was only secondary. Surely, Samuel could stand in this matter with the Lord himself. Thus ought we always to remember that offense against us when we are in the path of duty, is really offense against God; we may bear it together. The servant is not greater than his Lord. “Marvel not if the world hate you.” No, nor if the church hate you and turn away from you. They had turned away from Samuel as they had before done from Moses, and as they afterward did from Christ. Let us still be God’s faithful servant, whether his people receive us or reject us, much more without reference to the attitude of the world.

4.—The sinfulness of their demand.—This has already been pointed out in part. It consisted in: (a) That they had apostatized from God in their hearts, and were really seeking to get themselves free from God. (b) That they were worldly and proud, and desired to be like the worldly and wicked nations around them. (c) That they

were more ready to trust in the arm of flesh than in Jehovah, to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. (d) That they were impious, in that they decided on a course of action irrespective of God's will, and without even so much as seeking it. These elements of sin appear in all the actions of the individual and church life when they are bent on having their own carnal way. Let us "take heed lest there be in us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." (Heb. iv, 12; Jer. ii, 13.)

II.—THEIR DEMAND GRANTED, UNDER PROTEST.

Had these elders made inquiry of the Lord concerning a king, no doubt they would have been instructed as to his purpose. In after years the disciples asked Jesus: "Wilt thou, at this time, restore the kingdom?" They were answered not definitely, but in such a way as fully comforted and satisfied them, and bidden what they should do in the meantime. (Acts i, 6-14.) The elders had taken the bit in their own mouth. They were not desirous of knowing God's will, but just determined to have their own; therefore, God gave them their way. He knew that they were bent and set to the course of mischief which they had planned, and so he gave them their desire, and instructed Samuel not to oppose them, but to let them have a king according to their own desire, and one after their own heart. God gave them a king in his anger, whom he afterward took away in his wrath. (Hos. xiii, 11.) He does so with us. He has his own way, and if we will we may walk in it; but if we will have our own way, then we must have it, though we shall pay dearly for it, as Israel did in this and other cases, even though in the end God makes our blunders and sins at once correct our faults and work out his will. The conflict between the divine will and the human will is always going forward, and yet God has his way in spite of our perverse interference. It is but a bitter way for us when we go contrary to his will, which is our highest good. In this case God yet sets before them the evil consequences of their course.

1.—They are warned of the evil before them.—"Howbeit, protest solemnly unto them and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them." This was their opportunity to turn back, but they would none of it. They were preparing for themselves a stern military government, in which their sons should be drafted into the army, their daughters taken for service in the king's household, and perhaps, as in Solomon's day, for worse purposes; their taxes would be vastly increased; their harvest would be levied upon to support the kingly government; their servants and their cattle would be forcibly

impressed, and by and by the tyranny of kingly government would be so bitter and terrible, that they would cry out to the Lord to be delivered from the king whom they now insisted upon; but then it would be too late. "The Lord will not hear you in that day." They would not hearken to the Lord now, so neither would the Lord hearken then. If they made this bed for themselves, they must lie in it. We should take this lesson to ourselves and be warned by it. If we sow to the wind we shall reap the whirlwind. God often takes our own doing, and makes it a rod to chastise us with.

2.—They did not heed the warning.—"Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay, but we will have a king over us." Sin is headstrong; and when the heart is set to do mischief, the chances are that no warning from God will hinder or operate to prevent. It often happens that God's only way with us is to give us our way. In all this we have a graphic setting forth of the strength of the passions of men when they are once aroused. They carry men, and sometimes churches, headlong in spite of the rights and obligation due to others, as in Samuel's case; in spite of a clear statement of the wrong in the case; in spite of personal loss which is clearly set before us; in spite of the most tender remonstrances and the manifest disapproval of God. How we should shun the first suggestions of an evil course, and turn back at the first admonition; God never suffers any of his people to go wrong without first checking and remonstrating with them. If we sin we sin willfully, and not because we must. A stone falls because it must fall; but a man, be he Christian or sinner (but especially if a Christian), falls because he deliberately chooses, and will not be turned away from his wicked choice.

III.—SAMUEL ACQUIESCES.

From the account before us it appears that the elders would not, certainly they did not, take any part in the prayers and intercessions of Samuel. They never once said, "Inquire of the Lord for us," or "Pray for us." They simply made their demands and announced their ultimatum. "We will have a king." But Samuel was constantly going back and forth in prayer to the Lord. He first laid the complaint and demand of the elders before the Lord. Then he brought to the elders the word of the Lord; and when they would not hear, he goes back to the Lord and rehearses their answer to the divine protest. When this final answer is given, and the Lord again tells Samuel to hearken unto them, he seems to acquiesce entirely. He, at least, will be subject to God's will. He will not contend for his own office and

rights. In this he truly represented the Messianic Prophet of whom he was the type. He finally dismissed the elders to their tents. The true servant of God accepts the issue of things when he sees the hand of God in them, and adjusts himself to the altered circumstances. Samuel did not sulk in his tent, but held himself in readiness to prepare the way for his own successor. It is better to serve God than man; for, in any case, when we are serving God, we may be sure of blessing and at least gladness in our own hearts. Samuel's devotion to his country and nation, and to Saul, in all the rest of his life, is one of the most beautiful pictures in the Scriptures.

LESSON XXXI.

SAUL CHOSEN OF THE LORD.—I. Sam. ix, 15-27.

GOLDEN TEXT.—By me kings reign and princes decree justice.—Prov. viii, 15.

Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me. And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people. Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me? And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons. And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee. And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day. And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house. And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad. And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.—I. Sam. ix, 15-27.

We know not how long it was after the interview between the elders and Samuel that the events recorded in this chapter took place: but probably not a great while, for we saw how the whole matter was settled by the decided word of the Lord to Samuel, that he must consent to the demand of the people for a king, and Samuel's prompt acquiescence, in that he sent the elders away, each one to his own city—doubtless with the assurance that their demand was acceded to. In

the interval the people waited for Samuel to act, and Samuel waited for the Lord to speak. It was not long before the Lord "uncovered" Samuel's ear and spoke into it his purpose concerning Saul. (vs. 15.) Samuel at once ordered a sacrifice and a public feast in anticipation of the appearing of Saul, both that by this means he might prepare the people for the public anointing of Saul, and Saul for the high honor and grave responsibilities which were about to be put upon him by Jehovah. God is always forehanded with his providences, and is always ready to meet the emergencies which man thrusts upon him; for he knows what is coming since he is prescient in all things.

The expression in the first verse of our lesson is a suggestive one. "Now, Jehovah had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came." Literally, this expression is: "Now the Lord had uncovered Samuel's ear;" taken from the custom of thrusting aside the hood that covers the ear in order to whisper into it. The revelation of God must come to an uncovered ear if it is to enter into our hearts. Man's ear is so hooded and covered that, though he hath ears to hear, unless the Holy Ghost uncovers it, he will not hear the word of God. This is peculiarly true of the word of the Lord to us in the Scriptures. There are secrets in the word of God which the natural man or the careless Christian will not discover unless he sees to it that his ear is uncovered. The same as when the Psalmist prays: "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." There are things in this portion of the word which we study to-day that lie below the surface of the mere history which it records, as there are the hidden mysteries or secrets of God throughout all the records of God's word which are ready to be revealed to them who uncover their ears to hear, and open their eyes to see. May the Lord "uncover our ears" and "open our eyes" to hear and behold them.

I.—GOD'S REVELATION TO SAMUEL.

God has, in every age, servants to whom he gives knowledge of his purposes. It is a most blessed thing that God does take men into his confidence concerning his proposed dealings with man, as he did Abraham in respect of the destruction of Sodom. (Gen. xviii, 17; Amos iii, 7.) "Surely, the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants." So did the Lord admit Samuel into his confidence.

1.—"By whispering in his ear."—We do not know just how this communication was made—whether by a secret whisper in his soul or by a still, but audible, voice. It does not matter. Certain it is, that the communication was made to Samuel in a confidential manner.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." (Ps. xxv, 14.) It shall be our privilege to be God's prophets and seers if we thus fear him and do his will, and prove ourselves, by devotion to his interests, his friends. (John vii, 17; xv, 15.) Surely, it is worth our while to be counted among the number of them to whom the Lord makes known his secrets. Of old, he did it by the secret whisper; but now, having recorded all his purpose, he unfolds the wonders of his secret purposes concerning this world to them who search his word with humble diligence, and are purposed in their hearts to do his will. Saul was the object of this revelation; but the revelation was not made directly to him, but indirectly through Samuel. God has many a soul in this world toward whom he has a purpose of calling to the kingdom, and he has left it to us to whom he has revealed his purpose, to make known to them his grace.

2.—By pointing out Saul to him.—Though he was coming of his own free will about another matter to Samuel, Saul was secretly led by the overruling providence of God to Samuel, that he might receive the news of his election to the kingdom of Israel. As he drew near, Samuel no doubt being on the lookout for him, as John the Baptist was for Jesus, God spoke to Samuel again: "Behold, the man of whom I spake to thee." How carefully and surely God does guide and direct those who are wholly given up to do his will! We often say to ourselves now: "If only the Lord would direct us as he used to do his servants of old, how easy it would be to follow him!" I feel quite sure that the guidance of the Spirit is just as plain now to all God's children who are fully set to do his will, and who are daily waiting upon God for guidance, as was the special revelations of God to his servants of old; for our Lord distinctly declared that, "when the Spirit of Truth should come, whom he would send in his Father's name, he would guide us into all truth;" and we are told that as many as walk in the Spirit now are as surely led by the Spirit. (John xvi, 13; Rom. viii; Eph. i, 16, 17.)

3.—By directing him what to do.—Having pointed Saul out to him, the Lord next told Samuel what to do, viz.: "Thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel." God does not give us general information and instruction only, but minute and particular directions as to his will. We are to seek "in every thing, by prayer and supplication," to know the will of God as well as to "make our requests known unto him." "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to every man liberally, and upbraideth not." (James i, 5.)

4.—By unfolding his purpose concerning Saul.—Here are two statements. In verse sixteen he is declared to be the man "who should

be captain over the people and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies;" and in verse seventeen there is an intimation of what he would be to the people themselves, viz.: "The same shall reign over my people." Scholars tell us that the force of the word "reign," in this declaration, is "restrain, coerce, and control," thus intimating that they should, in Saul, have their fill of a king. He would, indeed, reign over them rigorously, and be to them as kings of other nations to their subjects. They would find him a hard master, as the Lord told them. God would use Saul, both to save his people from their enemies according to his loving kindness, and to chastise them according to his faithfulness. We can not but wonder at both "the goodness and the severity of God" in all his dealings with us. He often gives us the desires of our hearts when we insist on them, even though it be not best for us, and then uses the very gift we have sought at his hands to punish our unbelief, as he gave meat to the children of Israel in the wilderness and sent leanness to their souls; as he gave Zacharias the sign he asked for in the dumbness that chastised his unbelieving tongue.

II.—THE CHOICE OF SAUL.

In the choice of Saul, we see the wonderful wisdom of God and his goodness to Israel, who had sinned in "rejecting him from being their king." God's chastisements are not resentful, but faithful dealing tempered with tenderest mercy.

1.—It was in accordance with the demand of the people.—He was just such a king as their carnal pride desired. They wanted a hero; one who would make an imposing appearance as a military leader and captain; one who would be a striking figure as a king; one who would reign over them in the glitter and pomp of earthly greatness. Here he was: a magnificent man physically, towering above the people at least a head. How proud they would be of this "choice" young man and goodly; from his shoulders and upward, higher than any of the people! How often, in our folly, we have asked God to give us carnal things, to gratify our vanity and pride, choosing ourselves rather than accept his choice for us. Prayer is a blessed privilege, and the importunate prayer is a right exercise; but prayer should be made according to the will of God and in the Spirit and not in the flesh, and we should be careful about our insistence, unless we are sure that the petition is not one that we wish to consume upon our lusts. Many a Christian has had cause to bitterly repent the things God has given him in anger.

2.—It was also in accordance with God's purpose.—God also

had a purpose in giving them Saul. His purpose was from the beginning that they should have a king, and that the king should rescue the people out of the hands of the Philistines. Saul was not his choice for that purpose, yet since the people desired a king such as Saul would be, God will use him for the purpose of delivering the people; that is, in a measure, he would overrule their bad choice to accomplish his good purpose. In this the tender mercy of God is seen. He does not wholly cast the people off because they had cast him off. He looked upon them, pitied them, and heard their cry, and acted in mercy, though they had acted in rebellion. We shall never know the boundless depths and steadfastness of the great mercy of God, which he holds to steadily in the midst of our backsliding and ingratitude. He, indeed, heard their cry of deliverance from their enemies, though as a chastisement, he would not listen when they desired to be delivered from the very king whom they had chosen. (viii, 18.) Let us learn, from this, that God is able to order events so that more than one purpose may be brought to pass by means of one instrument. He can maintain and carry out his purpose of grace toward us, even by the hand of the instrument we have chosen for our lust. It makes us tremble, and at the same time rejoice, when we read these wonderful things in God's word, especially when we know that God is acting in his providence to-day on the same principles that are revealed to us here in this far-away history.

III.—SAMUEL'S GREATNESS.

It is true that the conspicuous character in this lesson is Saul, but we can not fail to notice that the greatest character is Samuel; a greatness seen nowhere more conspicuously than in his bearing throughout the whole of this eventful transaction. We get a little glimpse of the simplicity and modesty of this great servant of God in the incidental circumstance that, though he was still the judge and prophet of Israel, and had had the entire government of the nation in his hands for at least forty years, when Saul met him in the streets of the city he was in no way distinguished, by dress or bearing, from a common citizen. No badge or sign of office was about him; nothing was in his bearing to denote that he was the great prophet and judge. True greatness is not found in clothes or insignia, but in character. General Grant never was greater than when, at the age of forty-two, he met General Lee upon the occasion of the latter's surrender, dressed in the uniform of a common soldier, with his trousers tucked into his boot-tops and his clothing bespattered with mud. His mind was

intent on the great business intrusted to his hands, and not on the external dignities of his high office of General of the armies of the nation.

1.—He sets about doing God's will.—Forgetful of the fact that he is about to be deposed from the chief place of authority in the nation, he sets about doing the will of God, wholly regardless of himself. This is the mark of true greatness. All selfish purposes must go down before God's will; like John the Baptist, he must decrease before the rising greatness of the coming king, who must, in the purpose of God, now increase.

2.—He cordially accepts his successor.—In doing this, he is accepting God. The people had rejected God in favor of a king whom they desired, but Samuel accepts God in the king whom he had sent in accordance with his purpose. It is not an easy thing for us to accept and cordially welcome the one who comes to supplant us, even when we recognize that God is in it. Yet this was Samuel's greatness, that not with cold courtesy, but good-will, he goes forth to meet Saul, and heartily welcomes him.

3.—He prepares to do him honor.—Indeed, the feast that was about to be celebrated in Ramah that day, had been ordered for this express purpose and occasion. The duty grows more and more trying to the natural man. He first accepts the will of God in the choice of the man who is to supplant him, he then cordially welcomes him, and now he sets about doing him the highest honor in his power. Samuel was not a half-hearted servant, either to God or to his future king. "Go up before me unto the high place, for ye shall eat with me to-day." To be the especial guest of the judge and prophet of the land, was no small distinction to an unknown young man who was out hunting for lost cattle, especially when that honor was to be paid in the presence of thirty chief men of this capital city, the home and official residence of Samuel. But Samuel was hearty in honoring him whom God honored. We may all learn most important and lowly lessons here.

4.—He skillfully and gently prepares Saul and the people for the important revelation about to be made.—He first intimates to Saul that to-morrow he will tell him all about his asses, for this was the only thing in Saul's mind at the time. This intimation of Samuel's knowledge of the secrets of his heart, would prepare him to give heed to whatever Samuel might say to him further. Indeed, he proceeds to tell him at once that his asses are found, and to set his mind at rest on that point. Then he speaks a word which is calculated to arouse a strong curiosity in him, and to awaken a strange

expectation: "On whom is the desire of all Israel? Is it not on thee and on thy father's house?" What could this mean? Possibly Saul had heard of the conference of the elders respecting the king, but he had, of course, no thought either of himself or his father's house in this connection. Indeed, this startling announcement awakens a sense of humility in him. He recoiled from the mysterious hint conveyed by Samuel. Yet this was a very skillful way of preparing his mind for what was to come. "Then he took him and his servant and set them in the chief place at the table where the chief men of the city were assembled." This seat of honor was further supplemented by placing before Saul the specially-prepared dish, the "shoulder of the offering," which was usually reserved for the priest himself, as much as to intimate that henceforth even the priest and the prophet were to be under his protection. These acts of distinguished courtesy must have profoundly impressed the mind of Saul, and convinced him that Samuel's words were no mere formalities, but imported deep and high things. Likewise, this preference to Saul must have been a kind of forewarning to the chief men gathered at the prophet's table, that in Saul they beheld one whom God was about to highly honor. Perhaps they had been forewarned by Samuel, privately, that at that feast God would, in some way, indicate their king to them. Furthermore, after the feast, Samuel took him to the house-top and there engaged him in conversation, perhaps telling him all about the conference with the elders and the decision which had been reached concerning the appointment of a king, and yet without indicating to him, plainly, that he was the man chosen. Perhaps he prayed with him; certainly, he prayed for him. Keeping him all night, he awakened him early in the morning, to send him home, according to promise. Accompanying him to the outskirts of the city, he sent his servant forward, and then bade Saul stand still. Then he told him all the word of God concerning him. Thus did Samuel wisely, generously, and grandly discharge his commission to the man whom God had chosen king over him and all Israel. Our admiration for the prophet is unmeasured, and he is worthy of it all.

IV.—IMPORTANT LESSONS.

Besides the main features of the history, there are lessons between the lines of this record to which we should take heed. I can point out, by way of hint, but a few of them.

1.—God's sovereign will works its way easily and surely through the free working of man's will.—Saul was about a very common business, acting freely and naturally, yet God was guiding

him surely to Samuel for the express purpose of communicating to him the high destiny awaiting him.

2.—The unseen things relating to God's kingdom are of infinitely more importance than the things which we see, and, for the time being, engage our attention.—Saul was concerned about the lost asses; to the people, the important event of the day was the sacrifice and feast in Ramah; but the real business was the nomination of a king, and the setting in motion affairs belonging to the future welfare of the people, all directed by the unseen and unknown purpose of God.

3.—Many a man who goes about humble business dutifully is really on his way to the kingdom.—In other words, the pathway to the highest honor and usefulness is by way of humble and lowly duties.

4.—He who is called to a kingdom need not worry about lost asses.—God can find them for him. If we are called to higher duties, let us not worry about the lower ones which have, till now, concerned us.

5.—God often chooses men of low estate to do his mightiest works.—Indeed, this is usually God's way. Almost all his greatest servants have been chosen from the ranks of the people. Let no one, therefore, place too high value upon things which man regards as greatest; and let no one for a moment despair of being called to high usefulness because he is in a humble rank in life. Let not the exalted be proud of his surroundings; on the other hand, let not the humbly circumstanced be ashamed of lowly surroundings.

LESSON XXXII.

SAMUEL'S FAREWELL ADDRESS.—I. Sam. xii, 1-15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.—I. Sam. xii, 24.

And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found aught in my hand. And they answered, He is witness. And Samuel said unto the people, It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. And when they forgot the Lord their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelt safe. And when ye saw that Nabash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king. Now therefore, behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God: but if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers.—I. Sam. xii, 1-15.

After the events recorded in the last lesson, Saul went quietly to his own home and reported the finding of the asses, but said nothing

of the momentous transactions between himself and Samuel touching the kingdom. He kept his own counsel and waited for the further development of God's purpose. In this he acted wisely. Then Nahash the Ammonite invaded the country, and sent an insulting and atrocious proposition to Israel, the news of which aroused the spirit of Saul, and he rallied the people to battle and delivered them out of the hand of the enemy; and by this victory practically established himself in popular favor as king. Having now seen the end so far, and knowing that Saul was both approved of God and accepted by the nation, Samuel called the elders of Israel together to speak some serious and solemn words to them before retiring formally from the office of judge, which he had so long held among them. This address is called Samuel's Farewell. It was only so because he retired formally from office. Samuel's power had always been moral rather than physical or heroic. He still remained among them as prophet, and was held in high esteem till his death, and once and again came forth from his retirement on extraordinary occasions, and spoke and acted with an authority that was as undoubted as at any time during his long life and administration of the affairs of the nation. He was still, and till his death, the custodian and representative of all the best sentiment of the nation, and was kept in office by the Lord until the overthrow of Saul's power and the rise of David. We may learn from this that moral power, based on character and the favor of God, is always greater than mere official power, based upon physical force and the popular will. The portion of Scripture assigned for our study, containing a part of Samuel's address, divides itself into three parts: (1) Samuel's personal vindication. (2) His solemn reproof to the people. (3) The deliverance of a new commandment to them.

I.—SAMUEL RETIRES FROM OFFICE.

In retiring from his office, Samuel takes occasion to vindicate his personal character and official acts. This, we are persuaded, was not primarily for personal reasons, though it is but natural that, having been set aside by Israel, to whom he had devoted his long life, he should feel like showing them that their action had not been deserved, and was without just cause. However, his subsequent speech shows that, as ever, he was more concerned for their good and the honor of God than for his own reputation and personal rights. He was about to speak to them solemn words of reproof and exhortation. If these words were to have effect with them, they must first acknowledge his worth, for the value of counsel depends not on the mere wisdom of it, but

rather on the conviction of those who hear it, that he who gives it is worthy of being heard and heeded because of personal integrity and rectitude of purpose. Had Samuel been a venal judge or an oppressive ruler, had he been selfish in life or weak in moral character, his word would have carried no weight. However able a preacher or a teacher may be, however true his doctrine, if his hearers or scholars have not confidence in his personal character, they will not heed his counsel. Samuel was, therefore, justified in appealing to the people to bear witness to his good character, in order that he might the more readily and rightfully urge upon them the importance of the communication he was about to make to them. In addressing them, he first briefly rehearsed the steps which led up to the revolution in the government which had now taken place. He then proceeded:

1.—To accept and recognize the king whom they had chosen.—“And now behold, the king walketh before you.” That is, you have him whom you desired, and I cordially accept him. Henceforth he is to go before you as a shepherd, and not I. I cheerfully yield my office and authority to him, under God, and will be his servant as before I have been his ruler. This was most noble on his part personally, and was an assurance that he not only would not stand in the way of the king, but would gladly co-operate with him in a subordinate place for the good of the nation, and would himself be an example to them in obedience to kingly authority, as he had been just to them in bearing rule over them. Only a truly great man can thus heartily change places with one who has been his inferior.

2.—He surrenders his sons to them.—Their unworthiness had been the occasion of the people’s revolt from his rule. He now not only cheerfully steps down and out himself, but practically gives his consent that his sons be brought to trial for their offenses and dealt with before their king. He offers nothing in extenuation of their fault. They had not benefited the country, nor will he seek to continue them in succession to himself. Israel need have no fear on this score. There shall be no intrigue on his part in their behalf. He is not only willing to go out of office, but is content that his family shall pass out of sight with him. He is loyal both for himself and for his house.

3.—He vindicates himself from all cause of dissatisfaction.—It might appear to the people who had heard of the demand on the part of the elders for his retirement in favor of a king, that there had been some just ground of complaint against him. It was most natural that he should desire that such suspicion should be taken off him, and that they themselves should publicly acquit him before the Lord and the king. Like Jesus, who was falsely charged, he makes a public appeal,

and says: "Which of you findeth any fault in me?" This is not egotism, but a simple appeal to justice. A man's character, especially when he is in public life, is his most sacred possession, and he has a right to vindicate it before all the world. In this vindication Samuel mentions several things: (a) "*I am an old man and gray-headed.*" I have grown gray in your service. God has preserved me in office all these years. Character is cumulative. Had he been an unfaithful man, it would have appeared by this time. It is not possible to smother secret sin through many years. Age and gray hairs are, in general, a presumptive argument in favor of a righteous life. As a rule, bad men do not reach old age. Sin and wickedness undermine even the physical forces as well as character, so that both are apt to break down and fall into ruin. He, therefore, appeals to his age and gray hairs. (b) "*I have walked before you from my childhood, to this day.*" Not only had the ways of his life been known to them from his youth, but it had been an open walk before them. Had there been any evil thing in him—that is, in his official acts—they would long ere now have discovered it. He had not come to them, in middle life, with the possible faults of youth hidden from their eyes. The man who can appeal to his neighbors, who have known him from childhood, has an advantage that no other one has. Paul made use of this argument on two different occasions. "My manner of life from my youth, know all the Jews, which know me from the beginning." (Acts xxvi, 4, 5; I. Thess. i, 5, 9; II. Tim. iii, 10.) Youthful piety and integrity is the best guarantee of an honorable old age. (c) *He appeals to his life-long habits of administration.* He challenges any one to accuse him of enriching himself at their expense: "Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken?" Perhaps there was a hint in this, that they would find it different now that they had a king. Or who shall charge him with having defrauded them in any transaction? Or from whom, in all these years, had he ever taken a bribe to blind his eyes, either to oppress the rich or to do injustice to the poor; to shield the one or pass over the rights of the other? They had accused his sons of doing this, and he had freely consented that they should stand before the king for punishment if the people so elected; but who would charge him with doing any such thing? And yet they had rejected him. If any man could find any of these things against him, he was ready humbly to confess it and make restitution. A good man can afford to open his life to the inspection of all men, and to throw himself boldly into the hands of his accusers. He does not say that there were no faults in his private life, but in the public administration of his office he boldly challenges the most minute inspection. If we may, in our old age, be

able to make such a challenge and appeal, we shall have done well for ourselves and for the glory of God, whose we are and whom we serve.

4.—He challenges the people to speak.—He is not content to speak in his own vindication, but boldly demands the people there, in presence of God and the king, to speak out; and if what he has said of himself is true, he demands that the people should ratify it in the presence of these august witnesses. And when the people spoke out and confirmed his testimony to his own integrity, he called upon them to take notice that both the Lord and the king heard their witness. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." (Prov. xvi, 7.) There seems to have been a double purpose in this challenge: First, that his own integrity might stand forth in this critical time, and especially in view of the fact of what was to follow. Second, that they might see their own folly and ingratitude in rejecting him from being their judge and the Lord from being their king, who had hitherto ruled them through his office, which fact he now proceeds to show them.

II.—HE REPROVES THE PEOPLE.

Having won the moral right and authority to speak to them concerning their actions in this matter, for the last time he bids them stand forth or be silent, while he speaks yet further to them. He had voluntarily come into court and put himself on trial before God and the king, calling on the people to witness against him if they could. He now brings them into the same court and prefers charges against them, and at the same time, himself dropping out of sight, brings them face to face with their ingratitude to God, whom they had rejected in rejecting him and demanding a king. He thus completely turns the tables on them, not that he might enjoy a personal triumph over them, but that he might do them good and lead them to repentance and obedience. Having first reminded them that it was the Lord who had raised up Moses and Aaron, their first great leaders, and advanced them, not as kings, but as judge and priest, calls them to witness:

1.—A great deliverance.—They made the peril they stood in from the surrounding nations one of the pretexts for demanding a king. He reminds them that when their fathers were in bondage to Egypt—a condition a thousand times worse and more hopeless than any in which they had ever been since—God, acting for them, sent Moses and Aaron down into Egypt without an army and without weapons (in answer to their cry), and brought them forth out of Egypt and made them to dwell in the land where they now were. This simple statement

would recall all the great power of God put forth on their behalf and all his righteous acts, or, rather, beneficent acts, done toward them. And now—for this was what he was seeking to bring before them—they were saying and had carried their saying into effect: “It is not enough to have God for our deliverer: we demand a king, that he may fight for us.” Alas! that we should ever be dissatisfied with God’s dealings with us, and ever have the thought that any human agency, however great, of our own choosing or ordaining, can do better for us than God has done in the past or can do in the present.

2.—A sad relapse into bondage.—After the Lord had brought them out of bondage and placed them in the land which he had given them, they forgot him and turned to idols. As a consequence, God sold them, or gave them over into the hands of three great and powerful enemies—Sisera, Hazor, and the King of Moab—who fought against them and afflicted them bitterly. This is a *résumé* of their history during successive apostasies. It reminded them of two great facts: First, that it was their habit to be ungrateful to God and forget him, and take up with the false gods of the heathen and disgrace themselves with their horrible and bestial worship, and so their present action was in line with their past evil conduct; second, that voluntary sin was a voluntary sale of themselves to the bondage of sin, and that such a course always brought with it terrible afflictions and bitter chastisements. The way of the transgressor is always a hard way. God himself can not save a people, a nation, a church, or an individual from the evil and bitter consequences of sin into which they voluntarily go. They must now be prepared to accept the consequences of their present ungrateful apostasy from the government of God to that of a king, of which they had been fully warned (viii, 11–17): “God is not mocked. If we sow to the flesh we shall of the flesh reap corruption. If we sow the wind we shall reap the whirlwind.”

3.—An accepted prayer.—But God did not entirely abandon them to their evil ways. When they found themselves in evil case, and cried unto the Lord, and confessed their sins, and promised to amend and serve the Lord (vs. 10), he mercifully heard them and sent judges to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies on every side. This is a wonderful revelation of the long-suffering and tender mercy of God. When we read this story, and the whole history of Israel, we know not at which to wonder most: the persistent ingratitude and sin of Israel or the unchangeable mercy of God. This mercy of God, instead of giving us warrant to sin against him presumptuously, should make us the more careful not to sin. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all

unrighteousness;" but these things "are written that we sin not." (I. John i, 9; ii, 1.)

4.—Continued goodness.—Not only did the Lord deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, but he made them "dwell safely in their land again." He did not revoke his gift of the good land and large flowing with milk and honey; but gave it back to them. This he did again and again. The gifts and callings of God are without repentance. Our unfaithfulness does not change his goodness toward us. He forgives the backslider and restores to him the joys of salvation; yea, and even "forgets his sins," and puts him in his old place as though he had never fallen from it. Whether or not the old place is what it was to the restored backslider or not, is another question. I am inclined to think that all sin and apostasy, though it may be forgiven, and the sinner restored, does so far impair character as to prevent it from so full an enjoyment of God as might have been had, if there had not been apostasy.

5.—An ungrateful return.—Samuel now comes to the point of his reproof. After all these experiences, gathered up from the review of their past history, they make this poor return to the Lord. Not content to trust him and rely on his never-failing aid and goodness, they deliberately plot to change the government and reject God from being their king, and demand a king like those of the nations about them: a king who should represent mere heathen power and stand for carnal pride. This was the sore and bitter point with Samuel. This he wished to bring home to their consciences. What sin is there so black as ingratitude? If God had ever failed them; if he had ever refused to hear their cry or accept their repentance, and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, then they might have looked about for some king to deliver them. But now, without cause, they turn from the Lord to mere human power, for the king they chose was to stand for them in the place of God. They had not asked God to give them a king after his own heart, but had simply said: "We will have a king," and this they had insisted on in spite of the known displeasure of God and the remonstrance of Samuel. It was a clear and utter rejection of God. There could be no deeper depth than this until they should in after time reject and crucify their Messiah. This act of theirs was the precursor of that final wickedness for which the whole nation is now suffering rejection from God.

6.—A merciful compromise.—And yet God's goodness, mercy, and long-suffering survives this ingratitude. For in giving them Saul, God did not abandon them to their own choice. They *demand* a king. They did not *ask* a king from God. Nevertheless, in meeting

their will in this manner, God takes it upon himself to provide one for them, and yet retain such an oversight and control of him as that the people should not be utterly destroyed by their own folly. He still will be their God from his side, though they have rejected him from theirs. Thus does God mitigate our own wickedness, or the worst consequences of it, by his overruling providence and untiring goodness. We can never praise him enough for this revelation of his mercy and grace.

III.—A NEW COMMANDMENT.

Having set these things before them, Samuel announces and introduces to them, with formality, their king: one whom they rebelliously desired, and yet whom the Lord had set over them. He then proceeds to tell them that they may yet save themselves from the worst consequences of their action. He lays down two fundamental propositions. They were not new, indeed, but newly announced. If they will even now obey the voice of God, and follow in the way of his commandment, they shall yet be retained as his people and established in their land. This also applies to the king as well as to the people. On the other hand, if they will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against his commandment, then the hand of the Lord shall be against them as it was against their fathers. They had sought in an outward and imposing form of government a more stable condition; depending upon the outward rather than the inward condition of national life for permanent prosperity. They were for substituting physical power for moral force. But God warns them that their prosperity can not be attained by these means. With or without the outward formal and imposing government, they must look for blessing or be prepared for afflictions as they maintain an inward and moral likeness to God, or depart from that source of power. It is hard for us to learn this lesson. "Nominal Christians present an outward and, in emergencies, a more elaborate form of worship in the place of the sacrifice of the penitent and contrite heart," but all history and experience teach us that, however good external arrangements may be, *per se*, they are fruitless to secure the Church's truest prosperity, and an individual's most vigorous and joyous piety, in the absence of a faithful conformity to the whole will of God, as was Israel's acquisition of a king fruitless to insure, apart from righteousness of life, safety from danger and internal prosperity. "Abide in me." "For without me ye can do nothing."

LESSON XXXIII.

SAUL REJECTED BY THE LORD.—I Sam. xv, 10-23.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.—I. Sam. xv, 23.

Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night. And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.—I. Sam. xv, 10-23.

In the lesson before us we have a history of the culminating act of disobedience and rebellion on the part of Saul, which led to his final rejection from being king over Israel. This was the second positive act of disobedience to the specific commandments of the Lord which were given to test his loyalty to Jehovah. The first act of open rebellion and sacrilege is recorded in chapter xiii, 10-14. We conclude that a considerable time must have elapsed between that occasion and the one we are to consider in this chapter. The historian does not

record the time, but the progress of Saul's moral decay and apostasy from God. The general lesson we are to learn from the whole course of Saul's downward history, is that God is long-suffering toward those whom he finally rejects; that his judgment always waits on his mercy. Nor does God reject a man for sin alone, but for sin persisted in and unrepented of even in the face of positive promises of forgiveness. This was the case with Saul. It is the case with every sinner. David sinned even more grievously than Saul, but he had a tender conscience, and bitterly repented of his sin when it was brought home to him by the prophet. Saul, on the other hand, paid no heed to God's warning, but went his headlong way to do his own will and establish himself as king, in spite of God and the earnest entreaties of his prophet. In all history we have the same lesson. God waits to be gracious even to the worst sinners; but if they will not answer when he calls and repent when he points out their sin, then his judgment will be swift and terrible. So God dealt with the antediluvians; so he dealt with Sodom; so he dealt with Pharaoh and Egypt; so he dealt with Israel, his own people; so did our Lord deal with Judas; so he deals with every sinner. God waited with Saul, after his first warning, until success and power had developed his character. In the course of that development Saul grew only more and more imperious and self-willed, until his character became permanent. There is in both virtue and vice a tendency to permanence. This should make us watchful and very sensitive to the direction in which we find ourselves developing, so that we may strengthen and encourage every impulse to virtue and obedience, and repress and overcome every tendency in us to evil, especially in those particulars wherein we are most liable to sin against God.

I—GOD'S REPENTANCE.

The first nine verses of this chapter are devoted to a brief account of the commission given to Saul to war against Amalek and utterly destroy him and every thing that belonged to him. The commission was very minute and strict; there was no room for misunderstanding it. Moreover, it was prefaced with a solemn admonition, which reminded him of the fact that he was taken by the Lord and anointed to be his king, and that he was not, therefore, to seek his own interests or do his own will in this matter. Saul paid but little heed to this warning or to the letter of his commission, but interpreted it freely, and practically disobeyed it. (vs. 9.) "Then came the word of the Lord to Samuel, saying: 'It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king.'"

1.—God's repentance.—This expression has often troubled sincere and humble readers of God's word, as if it represented God as being unstable and changeable in his ways toward men; and as being contradictory of other statements in the Scriptures concerning the unchangeableness of his counsel; as, for instance, in the twenty-ninth verse of this same chapter, where it is expressly said: "The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man that he should repent." This difficulty is easily reconciled when we remember that all God's promises and threatenings are conditional; and that God's repentings represent a change of his administration rather than of purpose; a change made necessary by the alteration of man's attitude toward him. In this and all other cases, it also suggests sorrow in the mind of God over the perversity and sin of man, that compels him to alter his method of working, especially when he must turn from mercy to judgment. "We can not ascribe human feeling to God, and yet it is only by the analogy of human feeling that we can know any thing of the mind of God." Matthew Henry well expresses this when he remarks: "Repentance with God is not as it is with us, a change in his mind, but a change in his method; he does not alter his will, but wills an alteration." He had promised Saul to establish him in the kingdom conditional upon his obedience; but Saul had persisted in disobedience, and therefore God must, to be consistent with himself, change his method and deal with him according to his doings. God wills that all men shall be saved through faith in Jesus Christ (I. Tim. ii, 4-6), whom he hath given to be a ransom for all; but if man rejects Jesus Christ, and goes against his gracious will, then man must expect nothing but a change in God's acting from mercy to judgment. (Heb. x, 26-31.)

2.—It is long delayed.—That is, God does not suddenly cut men off after their first sin or disobedience. He is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but rather that all should come to repentance. (II. Pet. iii, 9.) "He is slow to anger and of great kindness." (Neh. ix, 17.)

3.—It is final.—There are limits even to the divine patience, and his mercy will finally cease. Not, however, as long as there is any hope of man turning to him in repentance. When, however, man becomes incorrigible and determined in sin, then God's mercy ceaseth, and he repents and sends his swift destruction upon him. If man will become as Sodom and Gomorrah, he will be destroyed; but even to the last God grieves over the soul whom he is compelled to give up. (Hos. xi, 8.) Yet, when he does finally repent of his mercy, that repentance is final. "There remains no more sacrifice for sin."

II.—SAMUEL'S GRIEF.

The story of Samuel's grief over Saul's downfall is very pathetic. When the Lord told Samuel that Saul had disobeyed him utterly in the matter of Amalek, he was bitterly disappointed and grieved. "And it grieved Samuel, and he cried unto the Lord all night." There is no doubt that Samuel greatly loved and admired Saul. He was pleased with his early promise of humility and obedience (viii, 21); and as he grew and progressed, he became proud of his noble gifts, his great intellect, and heroic achievements. He hoped much from him, and especially he hoped, after his warning and the second trial he had obtained for him, that he would yet rise superior to his imperious will and hasty temper. Now, that he saw all was over, he was distressed. Three elements are noticeable in Samuel's grief.

1.—**He was angry.**—The expression, "It grieved Samuel," is, literally, "it burned to Samuel." He was "indignant and very angry." (Jonah iv, 1, the same word.) This is a very natural turn of the emotions, when our love has been utterly disappointed and our hopes dashed to the ground by those from whom we have expected much. Samuel was vexed and indignant with Saul and the collapse brought about by his disobedience. He was not angry with God, but with Saul. The deliberate offenses and misdoings of those whom we love the most are the things that anger us most. God's anger burns fiercest against those who have most grossly abused his mercy.

2.—**He was in great sorrow.**—The momentary anger of Samuel was turned into bitterest sorrow for Saul. A good man may sorrow over a bad man's fall, as Samuel did over Saul's final failure. We can not but believe that in the heart of God there is something akin to this, even in his wrath over the souls whom he is at last compelled to cast off. It is this element in the divine judgments that makes them so terrible. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, which rejected and crucified him, even while he pronounced the desolating curse against that beloved city and people. God's tears fall upon the damned. Sorrow and anger are mingled in his judgments.

3.—**He was in a spirit of prayer.**—"All night long he cried to the Lord." Without doubt, he was yet pleading that God might spare Saul, as Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom. It is right for us to plead with God for sinners, even to the last. We can not know that their day of grace has passed, and never will until the final doom falls.

III.—SAUL'S SIN.

It is not difficult to gather, from the brief but graphic account here given, the exact character of Saul's sin. We shall note the particulars of it as briefly as possible. There is no doubt that its secret was in a despotic temperament that would bend to no will but his own. He had taken the bit of admonition in his teeth, flung the reins of ambition on the neck of his will, and rushed on to his destruction. His sin is revealed in the following particulars:

1.—**His ambition.**—The lust of power had crept into his heart. He had been successful in his wars with the nations about him; his military power had fired his ambition, and he determined to make for himself a great name and become, in the eyes not of Israel only, but the nations around him, a great and powerful monarch. This is seen in the fact that, immediately after his victory over Amalek, he started off for Carmel, and there set up a monument, or a kind of triumphal arch, to commemorate his victory over this, the fiercest of the tribes about him, and with Agag, the king, in his triumphal procession, he "went about and passed on, and went down to Gilgal." Here the pride of victory and the utter forgetfulness of God and his position as God's servant, are clearly seen. The glory is not given to God, but appropriated to himself.

2.—**Self-will.**—The whole story reveals the actions and thoughts of a self-willed man. He was tired of the interference of Samuel, and presumed that he was now quite competent to manage the affairs of the kingdom without the counsel of the prophet. He does that which is pleasing in his own sight. He haughtily defends his actions, and insists that he has carried out the will of God, at least sufficiently, and will not brook criticism from Samuel. He is determined, henceforth, to be his own master. He asks not Samuel to interpret the command of God, but assumes to do so himself. What I have done is satisfactory to my own judgment. "I have performed the commandment of the Lord." This is his judgment of his own action.

3.—**Disobedience.**—Samuel clearly sets before him the fact that he had departed from a humble submission to the will of God and set aside his commandment, performing only so much of it as suited his pleasure. God said, "utterly destroy the sinners of the Amalekites" and all their possessions (vs. iii, 18), but instead, he had spared the chief sinner—the king himself—and then "flew upon the spoil," instead of destroying it. These were the facts in the case. Here we notice that if there was not a deliberate purpose to disobey, there was, at least, a carelessness in attending to the words of God, or at least, a

presumptuous purpose to put his own interpretation upon it. Indeed, it seems that Saul did, in some sense, consider that he had carried out the will of God, at least in substance. Had he not utterly defeated and broken up the power of Agag; was not the captive king a proof of that; was not the destruction of the meanest of the spoil proof of it; and was not the chiefest of the spoil, which he says was reserved for sacrifice, a further proof that he had not turned away from the Lord? All this is the worst kind of sophistry. It is the kind of self-delusion which men are constantly practicing upon themselves. God says one thing, and they interpret it to suit their own views; God gives strict instructions, and they do something which they think is just as well because it suits them better. Indeed, it is just here that we see the moral decay that had gone on in Saul's heart. He had substituted his own will, his own wish, his own thoughts for God's, and yet insisted that it was quite right to have done so.

4.—Hypocrisy.—Not content with violating the word of God, and doing that which would redound to his own glory and further his ambitious ends, he seeks to cover it all up with a persistent pretense of having done the Lord's will. Twice he stoutly defends his actions by trying to force his own construction of the command of God upon the acceptance of Samuel. That is but the worst of sacrilege when we substitute our own will for God's, and yet seek to cover our disobedience under the word of God; that is, to take both God's name and God's word in vain. "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me." If we will disregard the word of God and do our own will, then, at least, let us not pretend that we are acting according to that word. There are many people who pretend to be Christians, and yet insist on disregarding the word of Christ; who utterly pervert his teachings, and yet claim the authority of those teachings as a justification of their rebellion and disobedience. His hypocrisy was completed by proposing an ostentatious sacrifice to the Lord. It often occurs that, just in proportion as men depart from God in their hearts, they ostentatiously worship him in outward displays of religious ceremonials.

5.—Meanness.—When his disobedience was brought home to him, Saul sought to throw the blame of it upon the people. "Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and the fatlings," etc. (vs. 9.) It goes without saying, that had Saul forbidden them to spare the spoil, the people would not, for an instant, have dared to disobey him: yet he now meanly says: "The people took of the spoil, which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord thy God in Gilgal." (vs. 21.) In this he at once confesses his

disobedience, and lays the blame upon the people, who only carried out his own orders. "Those who are willing to justify themselves are commonly very forward to condemn others and lay the blame upon any, rather than take it to themselves. Sin is a brat that nobody cares to have laid at his doors." Here Saul reveals his moral cowardice and the inherent meanness of sin.

6.—He seeks to flatter Samuel into an approval of his course.—First, by a fulsome greeting. "Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord." This was an attempt to forestall the rebuke, which he felt in his soul was coming, by flattery, and getting in a bold word in his own defense, and seeking to commit Samuel to his favor. Second, he sought to bribe Samuel by the pretentious proposition to do honor to his God. "To sacrifice to the Lord thy God in Gilgal." Was not Samuel's God his God also? This was a sure sign that he had put God out of his heart. "I have pleased myself, but to placate you," he says, "I have brought a great spoil to sacrifice to thy God." This is an utter confession of his apostasy.

7.—His sin is self-revealing.—"What meaneth this bleating of the sheep in mine ears and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" This was proof, at the very outset, of his disobedience. Our disobedience and sin always bleat and low in the ears of God. We may be sure that sin will always rise up to accuse us, nor can we stifle its cry. It is like the blood of Abel, that cried out from the ground to God for vengeance.

IV.—TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN TO SACRIFICE.

To all the excuses of Saul, Samuel announced this fundamental truth, which is repeated over and over again in God's word. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (See Psalms l, 8-14; li, 16, 17; Is. i, 11; Jer. vi, 20; Micah vi, 6, 8; and especially our Lord's own approbation of this great law. Matt. ix, 13.) Saul sought to atone for his disobedience by bringing a great sacrifice; but what the Lord would have accepted was a sincere repentance. His action in this case was much as if a man should practice dishonesty to get a fortune with which to gratify his ambition and pride and then leave it, after he had done with it, by will, to build a cathedral, found a college, or send abroad missionaries to the heathen. God will not be a party to any such transactions. Saul's sin of disobedience, in order to gratify his pride and ambition, is declared to be as the sin of witchcraft, always

denounced in the Bible as a kind of complicity with the devil, and as iniquity and idolatry, that is, the worship of idols and the secreting of private gods in one's house. The great lessons to be learned from this sentence of Samuel are:

1. That no amount of external worship will compensate for the alienation of the heart and will from God.

2. That nothing is so pleasing to God as simple obedience.

3. That nothing is so displeasing to God and so fatal to our own souls as disobedience.

4. That a persistent disobedience of God's word, or a hypocritical or presumptuous perversion of it, will end in our utter rejection by the Lord, no matter how many blessings we have hitherto received from his hands.

LESSON XXXIV.

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID.—I. Sam. xvi, 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.—I. Sam. xvi, 7.

And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee. And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.—I. Sam. xvi, 1-13.

It was in vain that Saul professed his repentance and besought a reversal of the heavy judgment against him. He had sold his divine kingship for an earthly one. He had rejected God and accepted the people. Had he feared God and not the people; had he sought God's glory and not his own; had he hearkened to the commandments of God and put aside his own ambitions, he would not have lost his kingdom. Deep lessons are here to be learned by all who have a "mind to attend to the teaching." His repentance was both insincere and too

late. He did not grieve over his sin, but his disgrace; he sought not to be restored to the favor of God, but to his proud place before the people. Like Esau, who chose the mess of pottage rather than his birthright, and afterward sought it carefully with tears, he found no place for repentance, though he, too, sought it carefully with tears. Samuel was inexorable in his refusal to accede to his request; though, after a second entreaty, he so far consented to go back with him as to break the violence of his fall; nevertheless he confirmed God's judgment and administered the most scathing rebuke possible by ordering the public execution of Agag. Having done this, he departed from Saul forever. Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul. Retiring to his own home, he gave himself up to despondency and sorrow. This mourning for Saul was both on account of the personal grief he felt for the great man who had so bitterly disappointed his love and hopes, and also because of the gloomy outlook for the nation which he foresaw, or at least, thought he did. Knowing well the imperious disposition of the king, he rightly judged that he would not submit to deposition without a desperate struggle. Like Elijah, he yielded to despair for the time being, and sunk into despondency from which he seemed to have no power to rouse himself. He reached the wrong conclusion that, because the instrument which God had taken in his hand to accomplish his purpose had broken, that, therefore, the purpose of God would fail, too, and the kingdom which he, Samuel, had been so largely instrumental in setting up would decay, and the people fall back into anarchy. He had, for the moment, forgotten God, and even the circumstances that brought about the present state of things, which might have been expected, and the declaration of God that he had a king in reserve which would establish the theocratic kingdom of which Saul's administration was but the premature prelude.

I.—SAMUEL SENT TO BETHLEHEM.

The providence of God goes forward to work out God's plans, despite the personal sorrows and disappointments of individuals. We are inclined, when a special interruption of our own plans takes place, or some great grief overtakes us, to imagine that the entire providential government of God is deranged. We have to learn, however, that God's plans and purposes are much larger and of vastly more importance than our limited knowledge or individual interests, especially as we understand our interests. In the end, every true child of God reaches his highest good by the outworking of God's ultimate purpose, though the pathway of that purpose strikes through some cherished

plan or apparent personal interest. God's providence has the right of eminent domain through every private life, and if we acquiesce in his way we find our indemnity in the larger good that comes out of his completed purpose. In the course of God's providence many centuries will elapse; many kings, some good and some bad, will arise and be set aside by death and otherwise; the people will sin and repent, rage and submit; captivity will overtake the entire nation, and even the Messiah himself, the true theocratic king, toward whom all these strange developments pointed, will be cut off, and the whole nation scattered and sent into exile for thousands of years, as they are at this day. The heathen, in the meantime, may rage, and people imagine a vain thing; "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed." Yet will God set his king upon the holy hill of Zion. (Ps. ii.) If our faith can only take hold of this large look at things, we may be saved from despondency and despair, and wait with patience for the outworking of God's plans, and confidently expect that for us, in the meantime, all things will work together for good, however the immediate circumstances may seem to be against such a promise. (Rom. viii, 28.) Therefore does the Lord rouse Samuel from his unwarranted despondency, and send him about his business to Bethlehem; for God had all this time been preparing a lad in that city to rule the kingdom which he had taken away from Saul.

1.—Samuel recalled from sorrow.—"How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?" God does not forbid us to mourn over those things that grieve us, but he does rebuke us if we mourn too long or unduly, especially if we allow our grief to become selfish and divert our thoughts from duty, or tempt us to take part against him. Samuel was in danger at both these points. He was forgetting the kingdom in his grief over Saul; he was on the point of taking part with Saul against the decree of the Lord. "Seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel." When God has rejected any person or thing and taken him or it out of our life, though we may mourn in obedience to nature, yet we must acquiesce according to the will of God. When Nadab and Abihu sinned in the matter of the strange fire and the Lord destroyed them, he forbade that even Aaron, their father, should mourn. (Lev. x, 6.) We are often tempted to build a tabernacle about our own grief or disappointments, and worship at that shrine instead of rising up, worshipping the Lord and giving him glory even at our own expense, as Job did when he said after his cruel afflictions: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job i, 21.)

2.—Samuel set to do the Lord's work.—Not only was there a rebuke for an over-indulgence of sorrow, but a commission to take up the Lord's work again. God's work must go on, whatever comes to pass in this world, whether to a king, a people, or an individual. That must not stop while we indulge our grief. Therefore, God calls upon Samuel to bestir himself, take a horn of oil, go to Bethlehem, and anoint him to be king whom he would show him. The best cure for our grief is a hearty submission to God's will and a prompt taking up of his work. This is God's great mercy to us, that he comes to us and sets us to work. "Fill thine horn with oil and go." In like manner the Lord recalled Elijah from grief and despondency, when he threw himself under a juniper-tree and wished to die, because things did not go as he thought they ought to. "What doest thou here, Elijah? Go, return on thy way to the wilderness, and anoint Hazael to be king over Syria and Jehu to be king over Israel." (I. Kings xix, 4, 9, 15, 16.) If any have fallen into despondency because of God's mysterious way, let them hearken for his voice, rise up and do his work, being sure that he is working things out after the counsel of his wisdom and love, and needs us to assist him in bringing his plans to pass. Blessed privilege, to forget our own griefs, sorrows, and personal disappointments in the larger plans of God.

3.—Samuel weakened by fear.—"How can I go? If Saul hear it he will kill me." Here we have a sad picture of the breaking down of this great man's faith. His sorrow had blinded his eyes; his long surrender to it had weakened his faith. He jumped at a conclusion—in fact, at two conclusions, both of them based on a partial knowledge and a forgetfulness of God's wisdom and power. First, he assumed that his commission was to anoint a king, who would immediately contend for the throne by raising a rebellion against Saul. Second, he assumed that should Saul hear that he had gone forth on such an errand, he would account him a traitor and at once slay him. He had assumed that God was about to do something which he was not about to do, and he had forgotten that, in any case, he who sent him forth was able to protect him. When God sent Moses to Egypt, he hesitated to go, for fear of many things. We are apt both to fill out God's commissions with matters that are not in them, and to interpret God's power and goodness in the light of our own limited knowledge. No doubt the path of duty is sometimes beset by dangers, but these dangers are always exaggerated by unbelief, despondency, and fear. Let us remember that, whenever God commissions us for duty, he always gives us this assurance: "Certainly, I will be with thee." (Ex. iii, 12.) In any event, if God calls, it is the part of the believing and trusting servant

not to "count his life dear unto himself, so that he may finish his ministry with joy" in the discharge of the blessed mission upon which God sends him. (Acts xx, 24.) Caleb and Joshua, the Hebrew children, Daniel and Paul, are all bright examples of that faith which shrinks not at any thing which God calls upon them to do. If Samuel's faith had not been weakened by a brooding despondency, he would never have raised such an objection as he did.

4.—Samuel's secret commission.—Samuel's thought was that no was to openly anoint the chosen king and at once proclaim him to Israel; but that was not God's purpose. The new king was, as yet, only in the bud of God's purpose. God was secretly preparing David for the kingdom, as he is secretly working out all his purposes. At the right time he will be proclaimed, but not now. Samuel's worst fears would have been realized had God's thought been his thought. "God wraps up the flower, which in due time is to open and bear fruit, within many a covering; to rend these open prematurely, is to destroy both the flower and the fruit which is to spring from it. And so to have anointed David openly and to have made him understand the meaning of the act, would have been to destroy David and frustrate the divine purpose." Therefore did the Lord command Samuel to go quietly and without proclaiming the real import of his errand, and hold a sacrifice, which was a common thing for him to do in the ordinary exercise of his judicial and semi-priestly office. There was no duplicity in this act. It is not for all men to know the secrets of the Lord; nor even in the pursuit of our own business is it necessary for us to communicate it to the whole world. Such a course would fill the world with confusion and break up all confidence in each other, for we can not rightly judge of each other's motives until the end is accomplished. There was no treason or rebellion contemplated. Even David, himself, was not let into the secret, nor his father nor brothers. They might think what they would: possibly that Samuel had simply chosen David for a scholarship in his college of prophets, which, indeed, was true, but not the whole truth. Still, the suppression of the whole truth wrought no harm to anybody, but, in fact, saved much harm and prevented many evil consequences. We need not fear that the Lord's command will ever involve us in unrighteousness. For God ever and only leadeth us in paths of righteousness, for his name's sake. (Ps. xxiii, 3.)

5.—Do the next thing.—"And I will show thee what thou shalt do." Bidden to take the heifer and celebrate the sacrifice, God promised Samuel that he would further direct him. So most of our duties lie along a hidden path; but as we are willing and obedient to God, trusting him in the present duty, he will surely open the way for us to

do the next thing. If we wait until we can see the end from the beginning, we will wait ever. It is enough that he knows the end from the beginning, and it is for us to walk in the light he gives us and on to the limit of the light, and trust him for the next step and for a further opening of our pathway.

"God's purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour"

to the willing and obedient servant.

6.—Duty faithfully performed.—"And Samuel did that which the Lord spake." His faith came back to him as he hearkened to the word of the Lord and yielded his heart to his will. His fear was allayed, the danger he feared averted, the promise of guidance given, his commission discharged in full, and he returned in peace to his own house, and there lived to the end of his useful life, full of honor and respect. So shall it be with us, if we follow the Lord fully as did Samuel, the greatest, as he was the first, in the order of prophets whom the Lord raised up.

II.—THE ANOINTING OF DAVID.

Saul had failed, but God had another and a far better man ready to take his place. We are now introduced to David, "the hero, the musician, the poet, the warrior, the ruler, the devout man after God's own heart, the many-sided man, the star of the first magnitude, the most perfect and suggestive type of Jesus Christ, the true and final theocratic King, who will yet come and sit upon David's throne, at once his son and Lord." (Matt. xxii, 42-45.) We need not dwell upon the details of the process by which Samuel was led to recognize and anoint David. Samuel himself at first fell into the mistake of supposing that Saul's successor must be found in a man somewhat like him, at least in so far as the outward appearance was concerned; therefore, when he first set his eyes upon Jesse's eldest son, who seems to have been a tall and handsome youth, he said within himself: "Surely, the Lord's anointed is before me." But the Lord at once warned him that Eliab was not the chosen one, and bade him not to look upon his countenance nor the height of his stature, for these were not the qualities on account of which the new king was to be chosen. And so it was not until seven sons had passed before him and the eighth, a young lad, who was not called by his father to the feast, had been summoned from the field where he was tending the sheep, that the Lord said: "Arise and anoint him; for this is he." David, as to his personal

appearance, is described as being "ruddy," that is, red-haired and fair of complexion, of "beautiful countenance;" that is, rather with beautiful eyes, "and goodly to look at." Nothing is said of his stature, but we may suppose that at this time he was but a slight stripling of from sixteen to twenty years of age. The choice of David was based on other than physical attractions, especially great physical stature.

1.—He was God's choice.—Saul had been man's choice. He was chosen to carry out the carnal desires of the people for a strong physical government, without reference to the religious development of the nation. In this case the people were not consulted. God was now choosing a king who would carry out his own purpose of establishing a theocratic kingdom, one who would raise the people to the high Messianic standard of moral and religious character. Man's device had failed. Saul partook of men's thoughts and purposes. God's choice was so largely a success, that David did put the nation on a Messianic basis so firmly that it never entirely lost it again, though there have been many sad lapses from it, and at present they are broken and scattered, and will be till David's Son and Lord shall re-appear, to establish the kingdom forever, after God's own thought and purpose.

2.—The principles on which God's choice was made.—God chose David, first of all, because he had the right qualities of heart. Man's choice was determined by outward appearance. Man looks at the visible and temporary; God looks at the invisible and eternal. Man looked only at a kingdom which should triumph by might and power; God sought to establish a kingdom that should be established by righteousness and overcome evil by good. Man chooses success as measured by an earthly rule; God works for character measured by a heavenly rule. We make most of our mistakes by choosing the outward and temporary, while God would have us follow his rule, and choose the spiritual and eternal. We seek to lay up treasure on earth, but God would have us lay up treasure in heaven. Man's thought has always been to subordinate religion to earthly power, as Saul would have done; but God would have earthly rule and power subordinated to spiritual law. Man seeks first the things of earth and adds religion to them; but God bids us seek first the kingdom of righteousness and leave "these things" to be added; therefore, if we would fall in with God's ways in all our choices, let us consider not temporary advantage but moral worth, looking not at the outward appearance, but at the heart of every thing. A happy home is better than a beautiful house; a good name is better than great wealth; a God-fearing friend is better than a rich companion. In church life it is better to seek after great spirituality than splendid ritual or worldly prosperity. In individual

life it ought to be our aim to be inwardly such as God will approve, than outwardly such as the world will admire and applaud. In our work we should strive to be faithful to God's trusts rather than successful in our endeavors. In a word, heaven is better than earth, and to be God's child is better than to be a people's king.

3.—God's choice is always consistent with eminent qualifications.—Beside and beyond the inward heart qualifications which the Lord saw in David, there were other natural qualifications which made him specially fitted for his high position. His occupation had developed in him great self-reliance, great personal strength, coupled with a manly courage; his solitary life had led him to a large communion with nature, and so with God; his musical talents and his poetic imagination rendered him eminently qualified to enter heartily into sympathetic relations with his people. In David, in fact, we see a man of sound piety, of kindly human sympathies, and great mental capacities, all combining to make him a king who would fear God and ably and lovingly rule over men.

4.—His double anointing.—First Samuel anointed him with oil and then God anointed him with his Spirit. In contemplating our calling to sonship and service, we need to have a formal relation to Christ by an outward confession, and an inward relation by the indwelling of the Spirit and the outward anointing of power from on high. So shall we be at once good witnesses, holy priests, and royal kings in the house and kingdom of our God.

LESSON XXXV.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.—I. Sam. xvii, 32-51.

GOLDEN TEXT.—If God be for us, who can be against us?—Rom. viii, 31.

And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee. And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. And the Philistines came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands. And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine,

and slew him ; but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.—I. Sam. xvii, 32-51.

The interval of time between the anointing of David and his famous battle with and victory over Goliath, is not given. It may have been within a twelvemonth after, or it may have been longer. Israel knew nothing of the decree of the Lord depriving Saul of his kingdom, and nothing of the election of David to fill the throne after him. Saul knew not that David was the man chosen of God to be his successor, though he knew well that he was forsaken of God. The evil spirit from the Lord (which was nothing more than permission that Satan should have his way with him) was working sad mischief with the great monarch. He grew more morose and violent day by day. This malady of the mind being observed by his courtiers, they proposed for his amusement and solace that a skilled musician be provided to play for him at such times as he was peculiarly depressed and morbid. The fame of David's skill was known to some of them, and he was sent for, and came to solace Saul with his harp. Here is a singular illustration of the ways of Providence. Saul knew not that David was his chosen successor; David himself knew it not, for the thought had not, as yet, entered his heart that his anointing by Samuel was for the throne. Yet God, by his providence, brings these two persons together in a most singular, though perfectly natural way. The end was that David might become acquainted with Saul and familiar with the court and the duties of a king, and by the wonderful experiences recorded in this chapter, and what they led to, be trained for his great work. Nothing could have been more perfectly arranged, and yet it all comes to pass most naturally. We are constantly reminded of this subtle working of the divine will with the perfect freedom of the human will, and the subordination of all human events to the purpose of God. David's appearance on the field of battle, at the time when Goliath was defying and pouring contempt upon the armies of Israel, was most opportune, and likewise arranged by the Lord in the most simple and natural way. Saul had lost his spirit. God had left him, and he who had been the military idol of the nation and the hero of a hundred battles, now cowered before the defiances of this uncircumcised Philistine. His own fear and lack of spirit quickly spread through the army, until the very voice of the haughty giant sent a shiver of fear through the whole host of Israel. It was a most pitiable sight. No wonder that the young shepherd of Bethlehem, who was

accustomed to think of Israel as the chosen people of the Lord, and of the great Jehovah, as being all-powerful and able to deliver Israel out of the hands of her enemies (for David had been born during the reign of Saul, and had never known any thing but victory in connection with the frequent conflicts with the enemy), found his soul stirred with indignation at the craven spirit of the army, and a burning desire to roll away the reproach which the Philistine was putting upon Jehovah through his people. "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (vs. 26; Deut. v, 26.) The purpose was now forming in his heart to undertake the combat with the giant himself. Turning aside the unjust sneer and taunt of his elder brother (vs. 28) with a soft answer, he still pursued his inquiries until at last the news of the bold and confident spirit that was in him reached the ears of the king, who summoned him before him. Whether Saul recognized and remembered his young friend who had solaced his troubled spirit with the harp, does not appear. Probably not. Here our lesson proper begins.

I.—DAVID OFFERS TO FIGHT THE GIANT.

It does not appear that David said any thing to Saul about the kindly reward which had been proclaimed to any man who should successfully champion the cause of Israel that day. His thoughts were not on rewards, but upon the honor of Israel and the glory of God. His motive was higher than any earthly gain to himself. We need not despise the free rewards of God's grace offered to the faithful servants of Jesus Christ, yet our motives should be higher than that of personal reward. It was so with David. His whole bearing throughout this affair shows that his mind and heart were filled with and exalted by much higher things than a king's daughter for a wife, and great riches and peculiar honor conferred upon his family. (v. 25.) If we are at first surprised that this young man is so superior in spirit to all the armies of Israel, a study of the whole situation will disabuse us of that surprise.

1.—David's faith.—"Thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." That which distinguished David at this time from all the rest of the men gathered on that memorable field, including the king, was that his heart was full of faith, while theirs was destitute of it. They had demanded a king after the manner of men; they had gotten one whose strength lay in his own arm. God had not been in the thought of the people in demanding a king, and now in an extremity God was not with them. They had come into a crisis when it was a

question of mere physical force, and they were afraid of the mighty stature and fierce words of the champion of the Philistines. They had staked every thing on the sword of their man-chosen king, and now they were about to perish by the sword. Earthly means and resources may bring deliverance for a time, but sooner or later the nation, or the church, or the individual, whose dependence is on an arm of flesh, will fail. It was so with Israel now. Not so with David. It is true, he was "but a child," but he had been trained in the school of God. Far from the court, he had lived with his flock, communed with God, and strengthened his heart by poring over the history of Israel under the guidance of the Living God. He had no other thought but that God could and would give deliverance on such an occasion as this. His astonished exclamation in the twenty-fourth verse of this chapter reveals the secret of his faith and the boldness of his spirit. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that *he* should defy the armies of the *Living God*?" So shall we always be confident in the face of all the foes that confront us, no matter how formidable they may seem to be, if we only keep our eyes and our hearts fixed on the "Living God."

2.—David's confidence.—His confidence was one element of his faith. When he proposed to the king to fight the Philistine, the king looked upon him, perhaps with some admiration; but when he noted his youth and the slenderness of his stature, he objected that his youth and inexperience were no match for this huge giant, who had been a man of war, a trained soldier, from his youth. Thus does human reason oppose faith; but David's confidence was in his God, and not in his own arm. True faith is never daunted by the objections of human reason. Human reason saw the great giant, and looked with contempt upon the inexperienced stripling who proposed to fight him. Faith looked at the Living God and despised the giant. Thus did Caleb and Joshua answer the reason of the terrified spies, who were demoralized at the sight of the giants and walled cities. (Num. xiii, 27-33; xiv, 1-10.) The bold undertaking of Christianity from the beginning until now has always been opposed and ridiculed by human reason, but for near two thousand years the faithful followers of Christ have gone forward undaunted, conquering all that has opposed the Gospel. Fearlessly has it opposed the wisdom of this world, and boldly confronted the strongholds of heathenism, and the high places of earthly powers; nor has faith been disappointed. Men to-day ridicule the power of prayer, the efficacy of Christ's atonement, and the need of missions; but the confident faith of God's people is undaunted, and is daily proving the superiority of faith to human reason.

3.—David's argument.—David's confidence was not mere enthu-

siasm. His answer to Saul shows clearly that he had a "reason for the hope that was in him," and he was prompt to give it with "reverence and meekness." (I. Pet. iii, 15.) We may learn from this that there is a heavenly reason as well as an earthly one. The reason of faith is no less intelligent than that of sight. Christians should not forget this in their controversy with the skepticism of the world that fights behind the breastworks of human reason. David did not at once proclaim the doctrine of faith in God abstractly, but sought to justify it even to the human reasoning of Saul. He justified his confidence on two things: (a) *A fact*. That on an occasion when a lion had taken a lamb from his father's flock he had gone forth and killed him; on another occasion a bear had done likewise, and when the fierce brute had risen against him he had caught him by the under-jaw, smitten him, and slew him. In either case his natural strength had been vastly inferior to that of his antagonist, and yet he had prevailed. It was not, therefore, a mere question of brute strength in the proposed battle with the giant. David refers to a fact. There is no answer to facts. (b) *An argument*. David refers to this combat with the lion and the bear as a basis of his argument. "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them." This was his affirmation. How did he reach this conclusion? *First*. It was not by his own strength alone that he had done it. "The Lord delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear. He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine." His argument was that he would enter into this conflict relying on the power of God. It would be God and not David against the Philistine. *Second*. If any doubted his right to claim divine aid in the coming battle with the giant, he reasoned that, if God would interpose to deliver him out of the paw of wild beasts when the matter in controversy was but a lamb of comparatively little value, how much more would he deliver him out of the hand of the Philistine when it was his own people who were in danger. He reasons from God's higher interest. Jesus taught us this in his lesson on divine care of his people. If God marks the fall of a sparrow, will he not care for us who are of much more worth than many sparrows? (Matt. x, 29, 31.) *Third*. If God overthrew the lion and the bear, who were but following their own brutish instincts, would he not much more deliver the Philistine into his hand, "seeing he had defied the armies of the living God?" Here God's honor was at stake, for the defiance was not to the people, but to the living God himself. The Philistine championed his gods against the God of Israel. *Fourth*. There is seen an underlying argument in David's address to Saul in his confidence in the unchange-

ableness of God's nature. He does not vary in his dealing with men. He who on a former occasion helped me when I fought in the line of calling and duty, and in confident faith in him, will, under the same circumstances, help me again. David did not seek this controversy. It was thrust upon him. Had there been another champion, he would not have offered; but seeing there was none to undertake for God, and that his spirit was stirred up in him to go out and fight, he had a right to count on the Lord's help. This argument convinced even Saul himself. Though he had no faith, yet he could not but admire and approve the faith of the young champion, and even wish him God-speed in his undertaking. Thus does faith, well-grounded and humbly but firmly held, tend to silence the cavil of unbelieving reason. Did we but hold ourselves to these principles, and act upon them ourselves, we should speedily sweep away the cavils of the skeptics and overcome our enemies. In all this David's faith was grounded not in speculation, but in the living God.

II.—DAVID PREPARES TO FIGHT THE GIANT.

A real faith does not content itself with an argument or a mere persuasion of God's ability, but it puts all the powers of mind and heart into action to work together with God. Neither does it despise the use of means. David did not look for a thunder-bolt to fall upon the giant and destroy him, but prepared to go out and meet him in actual combat. God had done wonders in the way of direct action, but it was not his normal method of acting. It has pleased him to take us into partnership with him and to use us as his hand. David, therefore, arms himself for the fight.

1.—Saul's armor will not do.—Sometimes human reason surrenders to the argument of faith, and then tries to arm faith with its own weapons. Thus did Saul. "At least," he said, "you must meet Goliath on his own grounds and with weapons of his own kind. He will fight with sword and armor; you must therefore be armed with sword and armor." David at first was not sure about this, and so he submitted to be clothed with these "carnal weapons," carnal only because proposed by human reason and not chosen by faith. These weapons had in them still the suggestion of human dependence. We often make a mistake in our work for God by choosing weapons which, in themselves, are calculated to bring success. Having proved Saul's by an adjustment to his body, he found it wanting. It cumbered him and interfered with the freedom of his actions. It fitted his faith even more awkwardly than it did his body. In preaching the Gospel we do not

despise the help of human culture and words of man's wisdom, but when they are substituted for the simpler and yet more powerful weapons furnished in the doctrines of the Cross, they are such that the man of faith can not fight in them. So David casts Saul's armor aside.

2.—The weapons of faith.—"And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the valley." David did not understand the use of sword and armor, but he was familiar with and skilled in the use of the sling and the stone. Every man must fight with the weapons he is best acquainted with. He chose them with care, and placed them in his shepherd's bag and went forth. So must we choose the right words of God, and thus "by the foolishness of preaching" go forth to meet the giants of sin and unbelief. After all, there is a higher wisdom in using the words of God than in the use of human argument and cumbrous human instrumentalities. In a hand-to-hand fight David was no match for Goliath, but with a stone slung from a distance he was more than a match for him, since against these weapons the giant's sword and spear would do him no good. We fight with truth spoken by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The proclamation of the incarnation, the atonement and the resurrection—the mighty facts of revelation—is a weapon against which human reason has no defense, and with which all her weapons can not cope. These truths are preached from afar, even from heaven, though they be sounded forth from human lips. The history of the world has proved their infinite superiority. The ages are strewn with the dead carcasses of the giants which have one after another risen up to destroy them and those who have proclaimed them. So David went forth to meet the giant. So let us go forth to the "good fight of faith," nothing daunted by the adversaries.

III.—DAVID PREVAILS OVER THE PHILISTINE.

The details of this signal victory are thrilling in the extreme. The youthful shepherd stepped forth before the army of Israel and drew near to the Philistine. When the proud Philistine saw David approach and observed that he was but a youth, effeminate in appearance because of his red hair and fair countenance, he disdained him.

1.—The Philistine's pride.—Goliath was at first amused at the sight. He could not for a moment think that that stripling could seriously think of fighting him, the redoubtable champion of Philistia. So have the mighty enemies of God met the Gospel of the meek and lowly Jesus. Sanbalat and Gershom thus laughed at Nehemiah and

his companions, and ridiculed the idea that these feeble Jews could build the wall of Jerusalem. (Neh. iv, 1, 2.) So did the Greeks at Athens mock at Paul, and called him but a babblers. (Acts xvii, 18.) Goliath was but riding his pride to a fall. When he saw that David held on his way, he became angry and felt himself insulted. "Am I a dog, that you come out to me with a stave?"—a mere staff in your hand such as you would use to drive off a dog from your flock of sheep? So do the proud philosophers of this world consider themselves insulted by the preachers of the Gospel. Then when David still came on he got angry and cursed him in the name of his gods, and haughtily declared that he would with one fell swoop destroy him and give his body to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field. So did the enemies of Christ seek to do with the early Christians. By fire and sword they sought to destroy Christianity off the face of the earth. How signally they failed let nineteen centuries of history testify.

2.—David's answer and defiance.—Nothing daunted, the young champion holds on his way and sends back this answer : " You rely on your sword and spear, and despise my staff and smooth stones. You curse me in the name of your gods. I do not rely on my staff, but upon my God, who will fight for me, and whom thou hast defied. You come in pride, I come in faith. You are confident in your strength, but I am confident in my God, who in past times hath delivered the bear and the lion into my hands. You boast that you will destroy me. I answer that I will, by the help of the God of the armies of Israel, smite thee and cut off thy head and deliver the armies of the Philistines as a heap of carcasses to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field, and let all the earth know that there is a God in Israel." Faith does not boast in human prowess, but is confident in God, and can answer back the boldest defiance which sin and unbelief can make.

3.—The victory.—Having spoken, David starts on a run toward the haughty giant. He adjusted a stone to his sling as he ran, whirled the sling over his head, and pronouncing his watchword, " In the name of the God of Israel," he slung the stone, and it sank into the skull of the giant, who fell down upon his face to the earth, dead. Some one has quaintly described this sudden defeat of the giant by saying: " There was a whirl of the sling, a whiz of the smooth stone, a thud upon the skull of Goliath, and a dead giant, all in a moment." " So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and slew him; but there was no sword in his hand." So may we prevail in the weapons of our own warfare, which are not carnal, but spiritual.

IV.—IMPORTANT LESSONS.

1. Faith in the Living God is the true source of our power in conflict with sin and unbelief.

2. True faith does not disdain proper means, and is characterized by Humility, Zeal, Skill, and Courage.

3. True faith seeks the glory of the Lord, and not a mere personal victory in its work.

4. An armed Christian is no match for an armed giant ; but a child of God armed with faith and the word of God is more than a match for the giants of unbelief and sin.

5. Every victory of faith is a witness to the whole earth, and puts strength into the whole army of the Lord, convincing them of the true source of their strength and calling them back to faith and courage.

6. Whenever we make our warfare a battle for the honor and glory of God, we are sure of victory.

LESSON XXXVI.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.—I. Sam. xx, 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.—Prov. xviii, 24.

And David fled from Naloth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so. And David swore moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death. Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee. And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. If he say thus, It is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldst thou bring me to thy father? And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee? Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly? And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field. And Jonathan said unto David, O Lord God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee; the Lord do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the Lord be with thee, as he hath been with my father.—I. Sam. xx, 1-13.

The great victory of David over Goliath, and the consequent deliverance of Israel, won for him from Saul great praise, and for a time Saul was disposed to do him great honor. But presently, when he heard the praises of David sounded above his own, he grew jealous of him. Subsequently his jealousy changed into hatred, and his hatred into a determination to slay him, first by his own hand in a fit of passion, and after that by intrigue and treachery. This pursuit of David

went on, till at last it became an open and avowed purpose, based upon a false charge that David was even attempting to usurp the kingdom. There is not the slightest evidence that any such thought ever entered the mind of David, or that up to this time, and even beyond it, David had as yet the faintest suspicion that God had chosen him to be king; though it is evident that Saul had a strong presentiment that this valiant young warrior, who was so evidently under the favor and protection of the Lord, was none other than he of whom Samuel had spoken as being the one to whom Jehovah had given his kingdom—that “neighbor” who was better than he. (xv, 28.) This suspicion so maddened and infuriated him, that Saul made three distinct attempts to arrest him by force, though David had fled for protection to Samuel. His messengers having failed, Saul himself went in person to lay hold on David. Here he was overtaken by the Spirit of the Lord and compelled to prophesy, as his messengers had done before him. (xix, 21–24.) Saul after this frenzy of prophesy had spent itself fell down into a trance, or state of unconsciousness, and lay all day and night naked. It is possible that, upon coming out of this state of unconsciousness, Samuel was enabled to quiet him and patch up some kind of a peace, so far as David was concerned, for it appears that he returned to his own house and prepared to celebrate a stated feast, that of the new moon (vs. 5), and ordered that David’s place be prepared as usual at his own table, and commanded David to be there as heretofore. While Saul was at Ramah with Samuel, it seems that David had fled for his life, and had secretly sought out Jonathan, being not only suspicious of Saul’s sincerity, but positively convinced that a new act of treachery was meditated against him. This brings us to the consideration of our lesson for to-day. The main facts are: the danger in which David believed himself to be; the measures which he took for his safety in this crisis; and the beautiful friendship of Jonathan for him, to which David so confidently appealed.

I.—DAVID’S DANGER.

David’s danger, as already intimated, arose out of the jealous hatred of Saul, and his conviction that he was to be his successor on the throne of Israel. The Lord had forsaken Saul, and he was now wholly governed by his own fierce spirit, which seems from the subsequent history to have been bent on frustrating the very purpose of God concerning the succession. He knew well that the Lord had departed from him, but he was determined, if possible, to prevent David from reaching the throne, and to establish Jonathan there as his

natural successor. Saul acted in this matter as any natural man would who had no fear of the Lord before his eyes, following a blind carnal purpose. In this he afterward confessed that he played the fool. (xxvi, 21.) All men play the fool, whether kings or commoners, saints or sinners, who deliberately seek to carry out their own will against the expressed will of God. In this course men may destroy themselves, but they will not frustrate the will of God.

1.—**David's danger was a real one.**—David was not mistaken as to his conviction that Saul was determined upon his destruction. In this purpose of Saul's against him he suffered from the fear of two things. (a) *He feared for his life.* "He seeketh my life." "There is but a step between me and death." The constant menace and frequent attacks upon him had rendered David nervous and timorous. He was no coward, as we well know; nor did he set an unnatural and selfish estimate upon his life. We have seen him quietly and bravely taking his life in his hand and going forth to fight with Goliath, and, on another occasion, to battle with the fierce Philistines. In those cases he was in the way of duty and fighting with an open foe; but here he was beset by a treacherous enemy, and every moment exposed to some secret assault. To think of dying thus ignominiously, and without a "fighting chance for his life," was most depressing. Nor was it unnatural that he should cling to life when there was no occasion to give it up for "God and native land." Life is a sacred trust as well as a most cherished possession, and we may all well cherish it. It is neither dishonorable in itself that one should fear to die, especially when there seems no need why one should; nor is it an impeachment of faith in God that we should cling to life, especially in youth, when the world is opening before us, and we are conscious of our powers to use life for personal advantage and the glory of God; and particularly when it is menaced by the malice and hatred of an enemy whom we have not wronged. (b) *He feared to die under the hand of Saul, because his character was at stake.* Saul had impeached his loyalty, and the impression had gone forth by the word of Saul that he was seditious, and was meditating rebellion and treason against the royal government. Should he be taken and killed by Saul it would tarnish his good name, and thus rob him of that which was dearer to him than life itself. There are times when a man's reputation is dearer to him than life itself. This was the case with David. He desired life that he might vindicate himself from the false suspicions under which he was resting, both in the mind of Saul, whom he loyally regarded as king (xxiv, 6, 11), and in the eyes of the people. All his subsequent conduct proves this, for time and time again he might have slain Saul, for the

Lord had delivered him into his hands; but he would not. Had Saul killed him he could never have freed his good name from the imputation cast upon it.

2.—It was an unmerited danger.—"What have I done?" Thus David reasoned with Jonathan. He was conscious of his righteousness, at least so far as his conduct toward Saul was concerned. He had never meditated any evil, much less done any evil that should deservingly imperil his life. It is possible for God's servants to be brought into circumstances of danger without any fault on their own part. In such cases it is but natural that there should be an anxious, even an indignant protest against the danger, especially as against those who meditate the evil upon us. There is a sense of injustice in the circumstances which surround us in such cases. This led Job to vindicate himself from the unrighteousness charged against him by his friends. "I will maintain (or defend) my own ways before him." (Job xiii, 15.) Paul also vindicated and defended his own integrity against the insinuations of false brethren. (II. Cor. x, 8-11; xi, 6, 10, 21-30.) Even Jesus, when persecuted by the malice of the Jews, appealed to his own innocence. (John viii, 46.) Pilate urged this argument in his weak attempt to set our Lord free. "Why, what evil has he done?" (Matt. xxvii, 23.) So David now urges: "What is my sin before thy father?" We have a right to appeal to our own integrity when under suspicion or false charges.

3.—It was a danger under God's superintendence.—David did not discern the hand of God in all this time of trial, and yet God was in it and over it all, caring for his anointed one and overruling all for his good as well as his own divine glory. God had his purpose in it all. So has he in all the things that overtake us, especially in those afflictions and chastisements which we can trace to no fault of our own. It is in such a time as this that we need to have and exercise a simple trust in God. To review the dealings of God with his servants in the past is good exercise for us. Moses driven in fear from Egypt when he was doing the best he could for God and his brethren; Daniel and the Hebrew children in the furnace and the lions' den; Paul suffering by the hands of his brethren and enemies, in prisons oft, in stripes and in afflictions. These things may not be explained on the ground of any evil-doing on their part, but only because God is working out some higher purpose than that which appears either to our eyes or to the eyes of the world. Jesus himself thus suffered at the hands of the wicked Jews, according to the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God. (Acts ii, 23.) We should learn to rest in the Lord and quietly wait to see the development of his purpose. The

wrath of man or evil from man's hands does not imply God's anger with us, or that he has forsaken us. If we are conscious of our own integrity, we may maintain a quiet mind even under the most discouraging and trying circumstances. It is a difficult lesson to learn, yet a living and active faith will enable us to go into a furnace of fire or a den of lions, and to sit at midnight in a prison with our backs bleeding from the cruel stripes of the persecutors and our feet fast in the stocks.

4.—The danger was not as imminent as he supposed.—To David there was but one step between him and death; and yet, as God knew and was planning, death was a long way off from him. The step between David and death was to be a very long one. Many years of peace and prosperity were in store for David. We can not see a step before us, but God knows all things from the beginning to the end. If we walk by faith we will avoid hasty judgments as to the outcome of the providences that surround us.

II.—DAVID SEEKS TO PRESERVE HIS LIFE.

In the circumstances in which David found himself, he very naturally and rightly sought to save his life from the hands of Saul. An assured faith and a perfect trust in God does not warrant us in abandoning the use of all lawful means for self-preservation. Our life is a trust, and we have no right to abandon it. It is a gift most precious, and we may not lightly throw it away or supinely allow another to take it from us. Our Lord himself more than once "escaped out of the hands of the Jews" who sought to take him; though when his work was done and the time had come for him to lay down his life, he did so. Paul also saved himself from the cabal that was formed to murder him while at Jerusalem. So David now takes precautions to save his life.

1.—The motive of self-defense.—As we have already said, it was not a carnal cowardice. He did not act the craven in this matter. He had more at stake than mere life. He had reputation and all the possibilities of that life which we must believe he had consecrated to God; and he saw no reason why it should be forfeited, either as having offended God in any way, or wronged his king. His appeal to Jonathan showed that he was ready to die if he had done any thing to merit it. "If there be iniquity in me, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father?" That is, I refuse tamely to give up my life without cause. David was as brave in defending his life in this case as he had been in hazarding it in battle with the giant or the armies of the Philistines.

2.—The means of self-preservation.—In order to secure his life against Saul, he went about wisely to accomplish his end. *First*, he seeks out Jonathan, his friend, and opens out all his fears to him. It is not wise to act alone in critical moments if there are friends whom we may enlist for us. Perhaps in thus seeking out Jonathan, he desired to clear himself of any suspicions which might have been lodged in his mind against him by the action of his father. He wished to save his reputation as well as his life. We have a right to call upon our friends for help in time of need. God has thus given us the sacred boon of friendship and the bonds of fellowship. We are not only to bear each other's burdens, but to divide our own burdens with our friends. *Second*, he takes counsel with Jonathan. What is best to be done? How shall we act in this matter? David did not wish to shirk his duty in absenting himself from Saul's table, which was his place in the official family of the king; at the same time he did not think it wise to go there under the circumstances. His absence without explanation might have led to suspicion; it was wise to avoid this. Then there were other questions that needed to be talked over. Jonathan did not fully understand the danger nor the real state of his father's mind. There is no privilege greater than that of a true friend with whom we may counsel in time of perplexity. Our recourse to God does not make the counsel of friends unnecessary. *Third*, they devised the ways and means for the saving of David's life and getting at the bottom of the trouble between him and the king. The proposed "sounding" of the king's mind by Jonathan; the absence of David at his father's house, which was a lawful pretext for keeping out of the way for a few days; his return after three days to hear from Jonathan the true state of Saul's mind,—all these precautions were wisely taken. God's providence does not justify us in refusing to act when we are in straits like this; it is, rather, to act with us, ruling in our counsels and blessing our wise plans. While we commit the keeping of our souls and bodies to his care, we must exercise our best wisdom in planning for the things we ask of God.

III.—JONATHAN'S FRIENDSHIP.

The friendship between David and Jonathan is so well known that it has become proverbial. David was dearer to Jonathan than his own life, and Jonathan "was very pleasant" to David. In Saul David had an implacable enemy on the throne, but in Jonathan he had a loyal and true friend at the court. The friendship of Jonathan was based on two facts. He was moved with admiration and love for

the young shepherd, who had so nobly, so modestly, and so bravely delivered Israel out of the hand of the giant Goliath, and so out of the hands of the Philistines. On this occasion, we are told that the "soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." (xviii, 1.) Afterward he discerned in him the elect-king of Israel, and he loved him as the Lord's anointed. This feature in Jonathan's friendship is clearly revealed in this chapter. (vs. 14-17.) That was a typical act, of which, however, at the time, Jonathan was unconscious, when he "stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." (xviii, 4.) Thus did Jonathan abdicate in favor of David, though at that time he knew it not. The points characteristic of his friendship, among others, are these:

1.—He loved him as his own soul.—When friendship is heaven-born it is like this. Where such friendship is it sticketh closer than a brother, and suggests the closeness of the bond between Christ and his disciples, and the quality of love that should exist between the brethren of the Lord. "Ye ought, also, to lay down your lives for one another." Alas! how far short Christian love falls of this standard; if not always, certainly too often.

2.—He loved him in adversity as well as in prosperity.—When Jonathan first gave to David his love, David was just back from his triumph over Goliath; he was the hero of the hour; the favorite of the king and the army; whose praises were in the mouth of all Israel, and whose exploits were the theme of the song of the young women who sang through the streets. But now David was under a cloud; his reputation was aspersed; he was a fugitive from the wrath of the king, and a price was practically put upon his head. But Jonathan's friendship did not fall away with David's prosperity. He was a friend in the hour of need, and thus proved himself a friend indeed.

3.—It was a friendship made in covenant with the Lord.—God had been called to witness it, and sanctify it. No friendship is really abiding in the best sense which has not in it the element of a mutual fear and reverence for the Lord. If the Lord joins hearts together, then the seal of Heaven is on the bond, and it can not be broken. All friendships should be made, having God for the witness and the third in the covenant.

4.—It was a self-sacrificing friendship.—Jonathan knew full well that David was to supplant him in the kingdom, and yet he was ready to favor and help him at his own expense. True, Jonathan knew certainly that God had appointed David to be his father's successor to his own exclusion, but it awakened no jealousy or bitterness

in his heart. His friendship was stronger than personal ambition or self-interest. Herein was one of its most beautiful traits. In the controversy between his father and David, Jonathan unhesitatingly took David's part, and yet without being disloyal to his father. (vs. 30-33.) His love for Saul was as filial as his friendship for David was deathless.

5.—It was not merely a sentimental friendship.—Jonathan proved his friendship not by words only, but by deeds. He acted in David's interests, became his ambassador in the court of his father, defended him openly, even at the cost of his father's reproaches, and entered into plans to save David's life from the wrath of his royal father.

6.—It was not an unrequited friendship.—If Jonathan loved David, so did David love Jonathan. Friendship can not always, even if for long, survive alone. If it gives, it must have in return. Only God's love can endure unrequital. In after years, David returned the friendship in deeds as well as now in words and sentiment, by showing kindness to the house of Saul, and to the son of Jonathan. Nothing in language is more beautifully expressed than David's lament over the death of Jonathan: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful; passing the love of women." (II. Sam. i, 26.)

In all this beautiful intercourse between David and Jonathan there are many suggestions of the high and holy relationship existing between Christ and his disciples, and it ought to be a pattern of friendship between brethren and brethren. In the jealous care for one another's lives and reputations; in readiness to sacrifice for each other; in freedom from all suspicion; in frankness and open-hearted intercourse; and in faithfulness of mutual vows and pledges; in the submission of each other's love to the sanctifying blessing of God.

LESSON XXXVII.

DAVID SPARING SAUL.—I. Sam. xxiv, 4-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.—Rom. xii, 21.

And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord. So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way. David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself. And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and thee and the Lord avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand. And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.—I. Sam. xxiv, 4-17.

The chapters intervening between this and the last lesson are taken up mainly with the account of David's flight from Saul and the king's pursuit of him, including the atrocious crime committed by Saul in the slaughter of the priests by the hand of Doeg. David had now without doubt come to understand the true relations existing between him and the king. Whether he gathered from the rapidly cul-

minating events, or from the plain declaration of Jonathan, or from some secret intelligence communicated to him by Samuel, the prophet of God, or whether from all these sources combined, that God had anointed him to be king instead of Saul, we do not know. It is enough that he seems now to have clearly reached that conclusion. This also was well understood by all Israel; at least this was the popular understanding both at the court of Saul and among the people. How far they recognized the hand of God in it is a question. David certainly accepted whatever there was in store for him as coming from the Lord, and not from men. A provisional court was already gathering about him, including the only surviving priest from the massacred family and city of Nob. The Adullamites no doubt looked forward to David's coming kingdom and clave to him. In the contention we see that Saul had his advisers, and David had his. The story develops the principles on which these two men acted. We also notice that this whole history gathers about these two men and the fortunes of either. Nothing, almost, is recorded of the people at large, or the state of the kingdom. Nothing of the work of Samuel in the meantime; nothing of his great school of the prophets; nothing of the social or agricultural conditions of the country. The fact is, that the entire history of the Jewish people is given us only as a background against which to see the steady outworking of God's purpose to bring about that Messianic kingdom of which Jesus is the divine head. Hence, we have to do with these Messianic kings, one a false one chosen of man, and the other a true one chosen of God. We should endeavor, in reading the Scripture, to keep the main purpose for which it was given always prominently before our mind, and interpret all things from this point of sight.

Diverted for a little while from the pursuit of David by a fresh incursion of the Philistines whom he went in person to drive out of the land, Saul returns to his purpose. In the meantime his spies had brought him word that David was in the wilderness of Engedi. Thither Saul seeks him with three thousand picked men. It was reported that David was concealed somewhere among the rocks of that region, and coming into the country, Saul has occasion to go into one of the caves that abounded in the neighborhood, and which were used by the shepherds for cotes for their sheep. It so happened that in the inner cave into which Saul came alone, David and his men were concealed. Saul coming in from the light, could not see them, but they, accustomed to the darkness and looking toward the light, plainly recognized the king. This was the providence that afforded the occasion for a divison of counsel between David and his men, which re-

veals David in a character that is as creditable to his high and noble manhood as to his profound religious principles.

I.—TWO WAYS OF INTERPRETING PROVIDENCE.

We can easily imagine the startling character of the crisis which was suddenly presented to David and his men. Saul was in the cave, alone and unprotected ! It seemed clearly as though God had led him in there on purpose to deliver him into David's hand. This, certainly, would be the first interpretation put upon this remarkable concurrence of circumstances. This was the view which David's men took of it, and they urged it upon David. They did not speak simply from a secular point of view. They regarded it as a special providence, and advised with that thought in their hearts. Their argument was: "It is well understood among us all that God means you to be king. You can not be king so long as Saul reigns or lives. God has surely put him in your hand, and given you the opportunity to slay him, or take him prisoner and dispose of him in any way you please. Therefore, do it at once. It will be to throw away an opportunity which God has made if you do not do it." Such was the advice of the men of David. It was a plausible line of reasoning, and at first blush might seem to be a fair way of interpreting Providence.

1.—Interpreting Providence in the light of self-interest.—We are moved to action by more than one set of motives. In this case, as it often is with us, David's men were moved by a low motive, that is, by a selfish one. Not that they entirely overlooked the divine will, but that they allowed their self-interest to control their judgment. We are apt to read God's word, both in his providence and in his book, in the light of our own wishes. In their advice there was certainly no thought of Saul except to kill him and get him out of the way. That is always man's way of disposing of an obstacle in the way of fulfilling God's purpose. That would be a swift and effectual method. The kingdom would at once be David's, and the places and power which they coveted would at once be theirs. They would not then have to wait and wander and suffer as fugitives and hunted rebels. They were in haste to reach their ends, which they thought were God's ends, not looking any higher. This has always been the counsel of worldly wisdom in things pertaining to the kingdom. Thus the devil sought to persuade Christ. "God intends you to have the dominion of the world. I acknowledge so much. Why wait for the slow outworkings of God's plan; why suffer and die to reach that end ? Take the kingdoms at once; I will resign and give them to you, if only you will be-

stow upon me an act of worship. What does it matter how you reach the end both you and God have in view, so you reach it?" So, also, said the disciples again and again: "Why are you so slow in taking possession of the kingdom?" They would have more than once made him king by force. They were impatient for the establishment of the kingdom, and for the chief places "on the right hand and on the left hand"—first and second places of honor and power. So would certain worldly-wise among the Galatian Christians have persuaded Paul to gain adherents by adapting his gospel to the carnal natures and legal instincts of men; in a word, by abandoning the unpopular doctrines of the cross and setting up a kind of reformed Judaism. (Gal. iii, 1-4.) So do men now, who are no doubt sincere in their desire to see the kingdom of God established, yield to the temptation of haste and seek to gain by short-cuts the desired end. They conform to the world, and interpret providences in such a way as to justify them in adopting means that are not in harmony with God's high spiritual laws. In private life, many men make haste to attain worldly success by interpreting providences to suit themselves. "Here is an opportunity to get rich; God has put it in my way; if I do not avail myself of it some other will; if God did not mean me to take this opportunity, why did he set it before me?" They do not stop to consider that their gain would be at some one's loss. They do not stop to ask themselves the question whether God's providences are not sometimes as much to develop restraint as to gratify desire. What would have become of Christ and Christianity had our Lord taken the devil's advice or yielded to the disciples' counsel? What if Paul had become a Judaizer? What have not individuals and churches suffered who have taken the "short-cut," justifying themselves on the ground that the end is according to the will of God, and the opportunity was presented by his providence? We shudder to think of the consequences of such conduct.

2.—Interpreting Providence in the light of higher truth.—At first it seems as though David was moved to follow the advice of his men, for he advanced stealthily toward Saul with his sword in his hand, and cut off a portion of his military cloak. Either his heart failed him or he suddenly came to a better mind and so changed his purpose, or perhaps he had no other purpose than to show to Saul later that which he did. At any rate, his conscience smote him for this slight indignity to the Lord's anointed, and he resisted the counsel of his friends, giving as his reason that, as a matter of fact, Saul was the king by God's anointing and, as such, was his master, and he dare not and would not do him violence; nor would he suffer his men to. Later

on we see this principle more fully developed. "If God has anointed me to be king," he says in substance, "God will himself, by other hands than mine or by the hands of those whom I control, remove Saul and make the vacancy for me." "As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or the day shall come for him to die; or he shall descend into battle and perish. (xxvi, 10.) If the Lord has chosen me to be his king, then he must bring me to the throne himself. I will not take it by force." In this conclusion we note the following considerations: He would not do any thing in this matter merely to advance his personal interests; he would not gain a personal advantage at the expense of doing a wrong to his neighbor; he was content to wait God's time for his advancement; he would not violate the ordinances of God, among which none was more sacred than to respect the "Lord's anointed," even to win a crown. He recognized that even his implacable enemy had rights that he was bound to respect. No feeling of personal revenge should enter into his dealing with Saul. Thus did David interpret Providence in the light of God's high spiritual laws and guide himself by those laws. Thus did he follow in the footsteps of Moses, whom God advanced by leading him to forsake earthly advancement; in the footsteps of Abraham, who was made rich and mighty by yielding the carnal choice of Lot and refusing to be made rich by the King of Sodom. Thus did he foreshadow the illustrious example of Christ, who refused to be made king except by God and in God's way. Thus ought we to learn the lesson that in the end God's way, though it may be a slower way, is a surer one, as well as being a truer one; yea, the only true one. Churches and individuals will do well to learn this method of interpreting God's providences and acting in the face of them. The way to life is through death; the way to success is through self-denial.

II—DAVID SPARES SAUL.

Having declared his determination not to touch the person of the Lord's anointed in violence, he permits him to leave the cave as quietly as he came. After awhile David follows the king out, and noticing him walking apart from his followers, he takes a position on some high point of rock and calls to the king. He raises on high the bit of cloak he had cut off, as a proof of what he is about to say. The melancholy king hears the cry of David, and looks behind him. As soon as David sees that he has attracted his attention, he bows himself toward the earth in a profound obeisance. There is no defiance or exultant word in his manner or speech. In his heart David pitied the unhappy monarch. He "loved him as a father, obeyed him as a king, and

honored him as the Lord's anointed." Here, indeed, is a man after God's own heart, however worldly judgment might condemn his course as being unmanly and too soft-hearted for a king of men. Some one has remarked that what the conduct of David lacked in heroic manliness, according to the estimate of the world, it gained in Christ-likeness according to the estimate of God. In a worldly view it might have been manly to have resented Saul's hatred and avenged himself of his injuries, but it was God-like for him to forgive them. The address of David to Saul is full of instruction by way of the revelation of character which we get from it.

1.—He testifies his loyalty.—This he does both by crying out to Saul in the language of loyal homage, "My lord, the king," and by bowing himself to the ground. Bad men and his own jealous and maddened heart, had persuaded Saul that David was a treacherous rebel. David would, first of all, show Saul that he was neither; that not even his heart was turned away from him, for he calls him both father and king, and so he was and should be until God ordered it otherwise; nor was he impatient for God to act in this matter.

2.—He deprecated the evil counsel of Saul's advisers.—"Bad men, selfish and wicked men, have deliberately poisoned your mind against me." He does not lay any charge against Saul himself, but throws the blame upon his advisers. "They say I seek to kill thee or do thee hurt. I am come out to prove that their words are cruel lies and wicked calumnies."

3.—He vindicates himself.—Having protested his loyalty and denied the evil reports set going against him by Saul's selfish and wicked advisers, David now demonstrates his innocence by showing Saul the bit of his cloak which he had cut off while in the cave. This was clear proof that what he said was true. Not only had he spared his life when he might have taken it, but he had had no thought of doing it; and he tells him why. "Because I regard you as the Lord's anointed, and so your person is sacred in my eyes. You are my father, and I would not harm you on that account. There is no wicked thought concerning this matter in my heart. I am neither ambitious of being king, nor am I moved by any feelings of revenge against you for all that you have done to me. 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked, but mine hand shall not be upon you.'" This proverb is conclusive of his innocence. Had he been wicked, he would have done wickedly, but not being so, he had spared him. We can make such a defense of our innocence only when we are innocent.

4.—He deprecated the king's attitude toward him.—"Though I have done no wickedness and meditate none, yet thou huntest me to take

my life." He does not bring a railing accusation against him, but remonstrates with him and tries to show him the injustice of his course. Moreover, he sets before him the unworthiness of his operations against him. "After whom is the king of Israel come out? After what dost thou pursue? After a dead dog, after a single flea?" This is not worthy the king. It is beneath his dignity, and must in the end bring reproach upon him. "There is higher employment for you. Strike the mighty enemies of God, and the king's real enemies, and the enemies of the people. Build up thy kingdom and do God's work, and let me alone. I am not worthy of this thy pursuit." This reproach was a reproof couched in the most reverent language.

5.—**He appeals his case to God himself.**—"The Lord judge between me and thee; and the Lord avenge me of thee. I submit my case to God, both for the righteousness of it and for my own defense. I will not lay my hand on thee to hurt thee, though thou hast been put in my way, and though thou again come into my power. I submit the whole case to God. If he has pleasure in me, he will avenge me; if not, I do not care to be avenged. It is not a matter personal to me apart from righteousness and God's will." Thus did David make an end of this thrilling, most beautiful, and eloquent speech. We may well study it for its abundant and suggestive lessons.

III.—DAVID'S VICTORY.

The evidence of David's magnanimity, and the absolutely conclusive proof of his innocence of evil design, either against Saul or the throne, was so irresistible that even Saul was overcome by it, and, conscience smitten, he broke down and wept at the thought of his own evil doing. It is true that his penitence was short-lived, but it was at least a testimony to the righteousness of David, and the rectitude of his course. It is worth something to compel an implacable enemy to confess as Saul did to David: "Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good; whereas I have rewarded thee evil." Thus is it possible to overcome evil with good; and thus are we taught the lesson of Christ as to the treatment of our enemies. David's victory over Saul in this case, and throughout all the prolonged battle between them, was a far greater one than his victory over Goliath of Gath. In that case it was physical merely, though it was accomplished through faith. In this case it was a moral victory. And a victory not only over Saul, but over himself. For he had to overcome himself before he could thus overcome Saul. The secret of his victory over himself in the cave in the face of the strong temptation to kill Saul,

who had been so implacable an enemy, and who stood directly in his way to the throne, is seen: *First*, in a tender and sensitive conscience. *Second*, in a reference of all his actions to the will of God. *Third*, in the prompt repression of the evil thoughts and impulse of the natural man. Had either of these been absent from David, he would have yielded to the temptation and killed the unhappy king in the cave. Man would have justified the act, but it would have blighted David's character and defeated the purpose of God.

LESSON XXXVIII.

DEATH OF SAUL AND HIS SONS.—I. Sam. xxxi, 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.—Ps. xxxiv, 16.

Now the Philistines fought against Israel : and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons ; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishna, Saul's sons. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him ; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith ; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not ; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together. And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled ; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth : and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.—I. Sam. xxxi, 1-13.

The intervening chapters are full of interest, but it is not given us to study them in this course. We have in them, however, an account of the death of Samuel ; the incident of David and Nabal, the churlish fool, and his marriage with Abigail ; the renewed efforts of Saul to capture and destroy David, and David's further generous treatment of Saul ; David's despair and flight into the land of the Philistines and his covenant with the king of Gath ; the interview between Saul and the Witch of Endor and the miraculous appearance of the spirit of Samuel ; the misfortunes of David growing out of his unbelieving alliance with the enemies of his people and of God ; and

finally, the recovery of his faith and the rescue of the families of his brethren from the hands of the Amalekites. This brings us to our lesson. The facts are as follows: Saul, after his interview with the spirit of Samuel, in which the prophet reiterated to him the fact that his kingdom was taken from him and given to David, told him of his own death and that of his sons, and also of the triumph of the Philistines over Israel. Saul, willful to the last, continued the fight with the Philistines, was sorely pressed by them, and finding escape impossible and defeat certain, to avoid being taken alive and insulted, as Samson was, after seeing his sons dead about him, commits suicide by falling upon his own sword. Upon this signal defeat the men of Israel dwelling in the neighborhood abandon their cities to the enemy and flee. That day the body of Saul is beheaded, and together with those of his sons is nailed to the walls of one of their cities and his armor sent, as a trophy, to the temples of their gods. Subsequently the men of Jabesh rise up by night and recover the bodies of Saul and his sons and burn them, burying their bones under a tree in their own city, and mourn over them. It is impossible to study this portion of the history of Saul without experiencing a great feeling of sadness. The hopeful beginning of this great man comes to such a bitter and terrible end. How many lives are thus blighted by willfulness, pride, disobedience, and perverse disregard of God's word and will! Whether we are to understand, beyond doubt, that Saul lost his soul, as well as his life and his kingdom, it is not for us to say. There are lessons in abundance for us to learn from this final chapter in the history of Saul, without speculating as to his destiny in the other world. The rational conclusion is not hopeful.

I—THE OVERTHROW OF SAUL.

There are different ways of reaching a conclusion as to the causes which led up to the final overthrow of Saul and his kingdom. Looking at the physical and human history, simply, the critic would say it was bad military management, and came about just as other disasters of this kind have come about; looking at it from the moral side, we can account for it from that point of sight; looking at it from the divine side, we discern the finger of God. In the record before us we have all three sides presented to us—the physical, the moral, and the divine. All these elements enter into the history of every nation, every church, and every individual, only we have not the pen of an inspired historian to open up and show us the mysterious co-operation of the hand of God. The advantage of studying human history

as written in the Bible, is that it enables us to judge of it as seeing him who is invisible, and as making a due account of the moral and spiritual as well as the physical forces at work.

1.—Saul's overthrow was the result of military mismanagement.—With this aspect we are not much concerned, yet it is an element. Napoleon used to say that Providence fought on the side of the general who had the strongest legions. He might have said also, with the general who was the best strategist. Saul's fatal blunder was that he allowed his insane hatred of David to divide his mind, so that instead of concentrating his attention and hurling his strength upon his enemies, he was constantly turning his attention and forces toward David. This gave the enemy a chance to recover from every temporary defeat and precipitate himself on Saul when he was unprepared. In a word, he neglected to concentrate his strength upon his real foe, and lost his kingdom by attending to side issues. Most human failures are the result of a want of concentration upon a single purpose.

2.—His overthrow was the result of a moral decay.—Saul had proved himself, in his earlier career, both a brave and skillful commander, and a true-hearted man. Later on he allowed personal ambition and a naturally imperious will to overcome a righteous and faithful purpose to do the will of God. He forgot his high moral trust in his selfish ambitions. This led him to acts of sacrilege and disobedience which alienated from him the favor of God. Mental perversity led to moral darkness, and this to fatal blundering in the direction of the affairs of his kingdom and the management of his armies. No man can hope to maintain a clear head and a sound judgment who violates the higher laws which govern his moral being. Sin always digs a pit in which the sinner is sure sooner or later to fall. "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." (Ps. ix, 16.) Sin is not only a crime against the moral government of God, but it is always an egregious blunder, so far as the sinner is concerned. Had Saul obeyed the voice of the Lord and been willing to give up his own willful way, he would have been confirmed in his kingdom, as God had promised; but he judged differently, threw righteousness to the winds, and suffered the miserable overthrow which overtook him, according to the word of God. (xii, 14, 15.) It is a solemn truth that physical results follow certainly upon the heels of moral causes. We can not divorce the moral from the physical world, especially in all matters in which man is concerned. Saul sowed a moral wind and he reaped a physical whirlwind. That is, his moral downfall led to his temporal and material overthrow. No kingdom, church, or individual was ever

overthrown without having been first morally undermined. The particular blunder which Saul made in the whole downward course, after alienating the divine favor, was in his treatment of David. He allowed his insane jealousy of his best captain to divert him from the main business of his kingdom; and, at the same time, lost the help of his valiant arm, and turned David and his men into enemies. No one can doubt but that, had he continued to fight the Philistines with David at his side, or leading his armies, instead of turning from the Philistines to hunt David down, he would have triumphed. He weakened himself doubly by his foolish course. In his own language, he "played the fool."

3.—His overthrow was brought about by Divine Providence.—God fought against him. Indeed, we are distinctly told that "Saul died for his transgressions, which he committed against the Lord; therefore, he slew him and turned the kingdom unto David, the son of Jesse." (I. Chron. x, 13, 14.) Also, the prophet tells us, that God took him away in his wrath. (Hos. xiii, 11.) Here we have a clear statement of the tremendous truth that God directs and controls in the affairs of men. If men are obedient and follow after righteousness, God orders every thing for their benefit; but if they obey not his word, and give themselves to unrighteousness, then God fights against them. Whose heart can endure and whose hands can be strong when the Almighty God is against him? In this case God left Saul and the armies of Israel without courage, and withheld his restraint from the Philistines, so that on the one hand there was the absence of the usual strength, and on the other there was an augmentation of it. Let no one think for a moment that God can be counted out of human affairs, whether they be the affairs of a nation, a church, or an individual.

4.—His overthrow involved the death of others.—This is especially seen in the death of Jonathan and his other sons. Jonathan indeed suffered on account of his father's sins, and not on account of his own. No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. Saul, when he knew that he had been bereft of the kingdom for himself, was determined, at least, to establish it for Jonathan; but instead of doing Jonathan good, he caused his death. We may not do evil that good may come. Many a man has deliberately sinned in his business in order to leave a fortune to his children, or win for them some earthly advantage; but all such schemes end in the ruin of those whom they sought to serve. It "is the old sad story of the sin of one bringing sorrow and suffering to many innocent others." We pity Jonathan, the brightest and best of Israel's sons; brave and gallant, know-

ing and deprecating his father's sins, and seeking in vain to turn him from his evil purposes; yet filial and loyal to his father and king. He died involved in his father's overthrow, we must believe, only to be lifted to a higher kingdom than that which his father destined him for. We need not conclude otherwise than that God ordered the best for Jonathan even in this seeming misfortune. Let us not have wrong thoughts of God, or come to rash and hasty conclusions as to what is best for us in this world, remembering that God has two worlds in which to manifest and bring to pass his purposes of grace. Doeg also died with Saul. Here we see a parallel and a contrast. Jonathan died bravely fighting for his king and his country, and no doubt went to his reward; on the other hand, Doeg, the armor-bearer of Saul, died by his own hand as Saul did, and went to his own place. Out of all this confusion God brings out his own order.

II.—LESSONS FROM THE DEATH OF SAUL.

Beside the more apparent lessons touching Saul himself, there are many collateral ones to be gathered from the melancholy conclusion of his life.

1.—He reaped what he had sown.—In his life he had turned away from God, and in his death he died without God; he had cast Samuel, his best earthly friend and counselor, from his side, and he died without the presence and comfort of the prophet's words; he had caused the murder of the priests, and died without the priestly intercession of atonement; he had driven David, his bravest soldier, from his side, and died because of the lack of his help; he dreaded that he should die and be dishonored by the hands of the heathen, and yet he lifted up his own hand against himself, and died the heathen death of a suicide. This is the first time that a soldier of Israel died by his own hand, which was the heathen way of death. If we would have the comfort and strength of religion in our death, we must not put them away from our life. We can not live a godless life and die a godly death.

2.—God confirms our own sinful acts and seals them as judicial punishments.—Saul died by his own hand, and yet we are told that "God slew him." A sinner's punishment is the result of his own sin, and God's judicial damnation is simply the confirmation of our own sinful choices, and the consequences of it. Hell is only making permanent the character we choose for ourselves in this life. God dooms us to the responsibility and consequences of our own choices. Therefore

he sets death and life before us, cursing and blessing, and confirms the one or the other according to our own choice.

3.—The wages of sin is death.—Saul brought about his death by his own sinful course. Every sinner is responsible for his own death and reprobation. It may be long delayed, as in Saul's case, but it is absolutely sure. Whether it be slow or swift in its coming, it will be swift at last; the blow may be long suspended, but will at last descend with lightning-like rapidity. "The wages of sin may be deferred, or may not be consciously received, but they are paid without stint, sooner or later; the fatal consequences may not always equally appear, but they never fail in some form or other." "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged; yet surely it shall not be well with the wicked; for the Lord will bring upon them their own iniquity; and shall cut them off in their own wickedness." (Eccles. viii, 12, 13; Ps. xciv, 23.) "He that being often reprov'd, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Prov. xxix, 1). These are solemn truths.

4.—The impossibility of a man arresting his downward course after he has cast God out of his life.—So long as Saul had not finally cast himself loose from God there was an opportunity for his recovery, but after God had left him, he was driven of his own wickedness over the precipice of sin to the destruction in which he was overwhelmed. Had he stopped at the first or second warning, or even later, he might have been saved, as Pharaoh and Judas also might have been. Having finally rejected God's mercy, there remained no power in him to arrest himself, though at times he seemed inclined to do so. The history of such apostates is being repeated every day.

III.—THE DEFEAT OF ISRAEL.

Israel had madly chosen a king, rather than righteousness and God. They had trusted in the power and might of their king, and had clung to him through all his evil courses, and now the crash had come which Samuel foretold. (xii, 18, 25.) "The men of Israel fled, and Saul and his sons were dead." They forsook their cities and fled. Since the capture of the ark no such calamity had fallen upon them. They had imagined that something else than that which God had chosen for them was necessary; therefore they had rejected both Samuel and God, and chose them a king to fight for them, and to rule over them as in other nations. Now they came in for their share of the desolations which accompanied this whirlwind of destruction that swept away Saul and his kingdom. Once before they had set up the

ark as an idol, and it had been captured and they left to destruction; again they set up a "man king" for an idol, and now he lay dead upon the field of battle, his kingdom shattered, and they scattered before the storm of disastrous war as autumn leaves are scattered before the wind. How much better it would have been had they followed after righteousness rather than vainglory and earthly splendor, and clung to God who had wrought so many wonders among them, and never failed to deliver them. It is even so with churches and individuals. When they depart from the simple way of righteousness, covet worldly success and vain earthly show, adopt means which the Lord has not chosen, and put their confidence in the arm of flesh, defeat and disaster are sure to come. How little did Israel gain; how much did they lose! Worldliness, formalism, and self-will always end thus. Let us cease from man; cleave to the Lord, follow righteousness, and leave ourselves and all our interests to him who is pledged for our salvation. In the meantime, we must not forget that behind this disastrous overthrow of the man-kingdom under Saul, and the chastisement which fell on Israel on account of their act in setting up that premature kingdom, the loving, merciful, and faithful Jehovah still reigned according to his purpose of grace, and was already gathering out of Israel a host like unto the host of God (I. Chron. xii, 22), who were rallying to the standard of David, the true Messianic king, who would yet deliver Israel out of all their troubles and establish the kingdom in righteousness. "The foundation of God standeth sure, for the Lord knoweth them that are his." Let not the true Israel despair, though there be many sinners who bring calamity and apparent disaster upon the church; but wait on God and rally to the standard of righteousness, wherever it is raised.

IV.—THE MEN OF JABESH-GILEAD.

There is a ray of light breaking out of this dark night of disaster. For when the men of Jabesh-Gilead heard of the death of Saul and the indignities done to his body and to those of his sons, they arose spontaneously and went all night until they came and rescued them, and prevented further insults to them by burning their bodies and burying their bones. This was as unexpected as it was heroic. It is interesting to remember that these brave men were befriended by Saul immediately after he was chosen king. (xi.) Here, at least, was some good seed in the life of Saul which sprang up. He had befriended these men in his early days, and now they rise up and requite, in some measure, their debt of gratitude to him. The worst of men leave some good behind them that we can remember with gratitude and requite

with honor. We may learn from this that the good which wicked men do will bring forth good, even after they have ceased any longer to do good. Also, that a good deed will not be lost, even though, like a seed, it lie long in the ground. Forty years ago Saul had defended and rescued these men of Jabesh, and now they come forward at the last to testify that they had not forgotten it. Let us all, by good deeds, generously and unselfishly performed to others, leave behind us material for a memorial that will surely be reared after we are gone. Here endeth the story of Saul, a man of many excellent, even noble qualities; but who was wrecked by ambition, willfulness, and disobedience to God. Let us take the lesson of this life to heart, and profit by what we learn of the unerring certainty of God's spiritual laws.

LESSON XXXIX.

The same course of alternative studies is open for to-day, as upon the preceding Review Sundays.

I.—REVIEW.

This may, as before suggested, be based upon the Golden Texts, or upon the lessons themselves. It might be well to question the children on the lessons, and ascertain how much they remember of each of them.

II.—A TEMPERANCE LESSON.—I. Sam. xxv, 23-31; 35-38.

Teachers will scarcely err in impressing too earnestly the duty and importance of temperance upon the minds and hearts of their scholars. The following Scripture is suggested:

And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; that this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid. So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person. And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he

held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died.—I. Sam. xxv, 23-31; 35-38.

III.—A MISSIONARY LESSON.—Psalm lxvii, 1-7.

If a Missionary Lesson has not been taught up to this time, it would certainly be wise to use this Sabbath in impressing upon the scholars the wideness of God's mercy, and our duty to speed the preaching of the Gospel to every creature. The following Scripture will suggest a good line of teaching:

God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations: Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the end shall fear him.—Ps. lxvii, 1-7.

LESSON XL.

THE TRIBES UNITED UNDER DAVID.—II. Sam. v, 1-12

GOLDEN TEXT.—Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.—Ps. cxxxiii, 1.

Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless, David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house. So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward. And David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him. And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David a house. And David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.—II. Sam. v, 1-12.

The first book of Samuel gives us an account of the royal government of the house of Israel in the hands of Saul. The second book, from which our present and seven succeeding lessons are taken, is a history of royal government in the hands of David. In our last lesson we witnessed the tragic death of Saul and his sons. David was at this time absent from Israel in pursuit of the Amalekites, who had carried away his people from Ziklag. The book before us opens with an account of the reception of the news of Saul's death by David and his summary punishment of the young man who brought him the news and proclaimed himself the final slayer of Saul. David's sorrow for the death of Saul was sincere and genuine. He had at one time deeply and truly loved him and at all times respected and honored him, in

spite of all Saul's unreasoning hatred of him. For Jonathan, who perished with Saul, David's love was as that of a woman. His lament over the death of Jonathan is one of the most touching and beautiful in any language.

The intervening first four chapters of this book record, in substance, the following incidents: After the death of Saul, David proceeded to Hebron, the capital of the tribe of Judah, in accordance with the word of the Lord. He was there anointed by the men of Judah to be king over them. Abner, the son of Ner, Saul's faithful commander-in-chief, still loyal to the house of Saul, took Ishbosheth, Saul's son, to Mahanaim, and made him king over all the other tribes. For seven years and six months David reigned over Judah. In the meantime, civil war had broken out between Judah and the other tribes, David waxing stronger and stronger. Finally, because of an affront put upon him by Ishbosheth, Abner deserted his king and went over to David, upon which other of the subjects of Ishbosheth entered his house and assassinated him. On the other side Joab, David's captain, betrayed and wickedly murdered Abner. David repudiated both the assassination of Ishbosheth and the cruel and treacherous assassination of Abner by Joab. No doubt both of the events contributed toward the overthrowing of all opposition to David's reign, and brought about the final consolidation of the kingdom under him.

Our present lesson opens with a very succinct account of the final union of all the tribes and the anointing of David as king over all Israel. Thus for the first time in this long history is the theocratic kingdom of God finally established in the hands of David, who was the first in the line of the royal house which goes by his name. Saul, though really anointed by God to be king, failed in having his house established because of his disobedience, but David secured his house forever because of his obedience. For a complete history of the events of this period the student should read I. Chron. xi, 1-9, where we have another account of it, evidently drawn from the same source as that which supplied the account in Samuel. The account in Samuel is more biographical than that in Chronicles, which is more purely historical, and tends to show us the royal government in connection with the throne and the Ark of the Covenant. It will be well also to read, in this connection, Psalms xxix, lxviii, cxxxii, xxx, xv, xxiv, xevi; I. Chron. xvi, 8-36; xii, 16-27; xxix, 10-19; which were all written to celebrate the occupation of Jerusalem. The careful study of these historic books, that to so many are but the dry and dead records of a half-barbarous time, will amply repay the devout and spiritual reader by revealing much hidden treasure of truth.

I—DAVID ANOINTED KING OVER ALL ISRAEL.

This is now the third time David has been anointed. Once by Samuel, when he was first chosen to be king instead of Saul (I. Sam. xvi, 12, 13); again by the tribe of Judah, when he was elected by them to be their king (ii, 4); and now by the elders and representatives of all the tribes of Israel. Thus, by successive steps, did David at last reach the throne of Israel to which he was called by the Lord. How many were his trials, how severe his afflictions, what terrible vicissitudes did he pass through before he came at last to the full possession of that for which he was anointed! It was so even with David's great Son, who has not yet come to his kingdom. Rejected, hated, and despised, and finally crucified by his people, he has passed now through the heavens, whence he will come again in power and great glory to sit upon the throne of his father, David. We may, without doing violence to the Scriptures, consider this as in some sort an illustration of how, through much tribulation, all the saints of God pass before reaching their final place of glory and power. The Lord's anointing is the guarantee of our final coming to the glory that awaits us, but many trials and discouragements lie between. Again and again, however, is that first anointing or sealing of the Spirit ratified to us, until at last we are established in our place, even the place and glory to which God has called us. Let us not be discouraged when trials and afflictions overtake us, but with David remind ourselves of the Lord's anointing, and sing even in banishment: "Thou anointest my head with oil." This is to remind ourselves of the immutability of his counsel who has promised us, and to assure ourselves that God's covenant with us will not be broken. In anointing David king over all Israel, the elders alleged three reasons. All of them would have been true at an earlier date; still it was better late than never that they accepted and anointed their king whom God had before anointed.

1.—As kinsman.—"Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh." Before Israel came into the land, Moses, speaking for the Lord, had charged them straitly: "Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee; thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother." (Deut. xvii, 15.) It has been suggested that David had been so long a sojourner among the Philistines, during the latter part of Saul's reign, that there was some doubt as to whether he was in fact a Hebrew at all. However that may have been, all questions in that respect were settled, and they now acknowledged him as

bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. This is a suggestive law here recognized, when applied to David's Son, Jesus our Lord, who before he was chosen king of saints and of glory became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; in fact, our kinsman and brother. It is a comfort to us that he who has the rule over us is none other than our own flesh and blood; the Son of man as really as he was the Son of God, born of a woman and made under the law, even though he were the Child of the Holy Ghost. This increases our confidence and makes our king accessible to us and full of sympathy for us; for what man ever yet hated his own flesh?

2.—As leader of the people.—"Thou leddest out and broughtest in Israel." He was also now recognized as the great captain who had been so successful in leading the armies of Israel to battle against their enemies. So they felt and believed in making him king over them, they could trust all their interests into his hands; and that he would in the future be a right valiant and successful captain for them. Even so do we recognize in Jesus, whom we choose for our king, one who has successfully met and subdued all our enemies. David slew Goliath, and Jesus overcame and dethroned the devil. David in detail overcame and routed the Philistines, and Jesus cast out the demons, healed the sick, and wrested victory from death and the grave. How safely may we trust him for our king who is so able to deliver us and save us "out of the hand of all our enemies and enable us to serve him in righteousness and peace all the days of our life."

3.—As shepherd and captain.—"Thou shalt feed my people, and be captain over Israel." In this they recognize the Lord's appointment. According to God's word, they were not to set a king over them whom the Lord had not chosen. On electing Saul they had violated this law and taken matters in their own hands. Now, however, they elect David to be their king in view of the fact that God had chosen him to be a shepherd and a captain over them. When we choose God's choices for ourselves, then we are sure to be right. The titles of shepherd and captain are very suggestive of the great work which our king does for us. Of David it is said the Lord "chose him from the sheepfolds and brought him to feed Jacob, his people; so he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands." Of Jesus the Son of David it was prophesied: "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people." (Is. lv, 4.) In all things connected with the exaltation of David to be king, we see the foreshadows of the coming and crowning of him to whom from the foundation of the

world all power had been given, and who was sent forth to us to be both Good Shepherd, Captain of Salvation, and Everlasting King.

4.—David made a league with Israel.—Having come to him and given in their allegiance, David put himself into covenant with them. They were to serve him faithfully and loyally as king, and give him all due honor and obedience as such. On his part he agreed and promised that he would be their king and captain, and faithfully defend them against all their enemies, and protect them in the peaceful enjoyments of their homes and their country. So does our king faithfully secure to us all the benefits of his great salvation; to give us grace for our day; to keep us from falling; and preserve us by his power through faith unto the day of our glorious inheritance. He does not make a bargain with sinners, but as soon as sinners choose him as Saviour and King, then he makes a league with them as saints to save them to the uttermost.

II.—THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM.

Jerusalem was the mighty fortress of the Jebusites, who still dwelt in the land. They had never been expelled, either under Joshua, or any of the judges, or Saul. It was manifestly the first duty and care of David to possess himself and his people of this stronghold. Having now been anointed king, and reminded by the elders of his former exploits, he prepares at once to lead Israel against this stronghold, and by conquest of it bring all the land, the entire inheritance which God had given them, into subjection to their own rule. There are still spiritual wickedness in high places, and strongholds of the flesh in our own lives which we have not succeeded in subduing, but which under the leadership of our king and captain we may yet subdue; but to do this we must first give him all loyal allegiance, and be led by him in the assault and conflict. There is no high place of sin that we are not able to subdue with him to help us.

1.—The defiance of the Jebusites.—When David and his men encamped round about, and laid siege to Jerusalem, the Jebusites defied him and mocked him. So confident were they in the natural power of their fortress, and the utter inability of any force to dispossess them, that they sent to David this mocking challenge: "Except thou take away the lame and the blind thou shalt not come in hither." Two theories are balanced against each other as to what this strange saying may mean. One is that in their confidence they had manned the walls with no defenders except the lame and the blind of their city, as if to say, these are sufficient to defend the city and fortress against David, and at the same time by putting up such

defenders they sought to insult the new King of Israel and his men. Another theory is that at some time David had spoken of their gods as being lame and blind gods, seeing they had eyes and they saw not, feet and yet could not walk. David had said that the gods in whom the Jebusites put their trust were no better than lame and blind. In either case the Jebusites defied David and said: "We are confident in our ability to hold the fort against you." Either they trusted in their gods whom David had mocked, and which were stationed round about on the walls of the fortress, or they were so confident in the natural strength of their position that they mocked David with the cripples and blind of the town. The enemies of God and of Christ have always mocked the powers of God and the Gospel. The people laughed Jesus to scorn when he went to raise the daughter of Jairus; they mocked Jesus when he hung on the cross, saying: "He saved others, himself he can not save." "If he be the Son of God, let him come down from the cross and we will believe him." The Athenians mocked Paul when he preached the Gospel to them. The world powers have always derided the feebleness of the Gospel and of God's people. As David overcame the Jebusites and captured their strong tower and fortress, so has Jesus and his Gospel conquered; and so in the end shall he who is still mocked come in power and great glory, and cause every knee to bow, and every tongue to confess him as Lord of lords, and King of kings.

2.—The assault and conquest of Jerusalem.—"Nevertheless David took the stronghold." He accepted the defiance, and rousing his people to enthusiasm, he proclaimed that whoever of his officers first led their band up the "gutter" should be the general-in-chief of his army. This gutter was probably a water-fall over one side of the high place, forming a steep ravine which it filled with water, and was supposed to be impregnable to ascent. At this unguarded point David determined to make his attack. Up this steep watery way Joab, who was the captain or general of the army of Judah, rushed and succeeded in gaining a foothold within the very fortress itself. (I. Chron. xi, 6.) According to David's command, the "lame and blind," whether they were literally so, or whether they were the idols whom he had so nicknamed, but whom he hated with his soul, were seized and hurled down the water-way by which Joab had successfully stormed the fortress. This action was in accordance with Joab's disposition. It also confirms us in our opinion that the lame and the blind were indeed the idols of the Jebusites, which were now hurled headlong down the steep places, as if in mockery of their helplessness to defend it. Thus shall all the enemies of the King be overthrown and cast down, even every

power that exalteth itself against God. We may also learn a lesson from this to the effect that at the very place where sinners fancy themselves to be the strongest, there they will be overcome.

3.—David established in Jerusalem.—Having taken this stronghold, David not only saw, as a military engineer, the great natural strength of it, but the importance of retaining it, and decided to fortify it afresh and permanently garrison it. “So David built round about from Millo and inward.” There was never such a military victory in the world before or since. What a place in the world’s history has Jerusalem held! Even now it is the most famous city in the world, though it is in ruins. The city of David, the city of the great King. It is the city that has given its name to heaven itself, which, in honor of Jerusalem, is called the New Jerusalem; the city which God himself made for centuries his earthly dwelling-place; the city in and about which the world’s redemption was accomplished. It shall again be rebuilt, and become the metropolis of the world. “Glorious for situation, the joy of the whole earth.”

III.—THE INCREASING GREATNESS OF DAVID.

The capture of Jerusalem was the final turning-point in the establishment of David, and in the permanence of his greatness.

1.—The Lord was with him.—“And David went on (from that point) and grew great, and the Lord God was with him.” Not with him because he grew great, but rather, he grew great because the Lord was with him. All true greatness is really to be achieved and measured by this rule, viz.: That the Lord God be with the man or woman who is great. Human greatness does not at all demonstrate that any man is great in the sight of the Lord, neither does a lowly place among the great ones of the earth imply that there is not true greatness with the Lord. John the Baptist was great in the sight of the Lord, though his life was but a short one, and his work, to human eyes, most humble. “The Lord was with him.” Let us secure this greatness for ourselves if we may.

2.—The nations about him became tributary.—As soon as it was known that David had taken and refortified Jerusalem, the nations about recognized that in Israel was a king to be respected and feared. The first of these to send congratulations and make overtures of friendship was Hiram, the King of Tyre. He sent ambassadors to David, and carpenters and masons, and volunteered thus to build David’s house in Jerusalem. The Jews were not an architectural people, and so Hiram did a very graceful thing. When the Lord is with

us, even our enemies are favorable to us. This also was the prophecy of the final inflow of all the riches of the Gentiles to David's Son, and to the everlasting kingdom which he will establish on the earth.

3.—David recognized the intent of his greatness.—Not like the King of Babylon, who said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have builded," did David boast himself of success and greatness; but humbly recognized himself as being but the favored servant of the Lord. "And David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake." God never gives any one of his servants prosperity or greatness for themselves alone, but that they may use it for the good of his people. We should ever remember, in the midst of any and all blessings which may come to us, that we are but the servants and stewards of God. Position, power, or wealth are all to be used in order to bless others, and not to be consumed on our own lusts.

LESSON XLI.

THE ARK BROUGHT TO ZION.—II. Sam. vi, 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.—Ps. lxxxvii, 2.

Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubim. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household. And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.—II. Sam. vi, 1-12.

David had established himself in Jerusalem. Hiram of Tyre had manifested his friendliness, and sent him carpenters to build him a house. The Philistines, hearing of his brilliant military success and fearing his power would increase, and perhaps nettled and piqued that this captain of Saul's, who had taken refuge with them during Saul's persecution, had now become possessed of the kingdom and united all Israel again, and acquired so strong a hold as Jerusalem, determined to break his power, if possible, before it became too great. Therefore, they came up against David. They were defeated disastrously. Nevertheless, knowing that they must overthrow and break David's power or become subject to him, they made a second invasion,

and were again beaten. This was the end of their power over Israel during David's reign. Now that establishment and peace had come, David thought long and anxiously of the Ark of God. His throne was established; but to him no throne of power and glory would be worth the having unless God dwelt with him and was the center of all. The Ark had been practically abandoned by Israel for seventy years. It had, in effect, been in captivity. Lost during Eli's time, it had been a plague to the Philistines, and was by them sent back to Judea. (I. Sam. vii, 1, 2.) It is not again mentioned except in a single instance, when Saul called for it. (I. Sam. xiv, 18.) During the entire period from the death of old Eli till the establishment of David, the Ark of God was practically neglected. In the house of Abinadab it had rested for these seventy years. We know nothing of it except that it had been cared for in that house and that Eliezar, his son, had been sanctified to take care of it. (I. Sam. vii, 2.) Nevertheless, God had not forsaken his people, though he had no ceremonial home in their midst. Perhaps they had not been worthy of the peculiar blessings which come to any people in connection with a regular and spiritually formal observance of divine presence and worship. However that may be, David now clearly saw that if the nation was to be truly God's people and the government really a Messianic one, the Ark must be restored. There may be external prosperity and power, but can not be permanent blessing without the spiritual and formal recognition of God. The truest consolidation of the government, and the only perfect union of the hearts of the people, could be had only in connection with the Ark. This is true of the Church of God to-day. There may be external prosperity and power, a splendid appearance of success, but no real prosperity where God is not enthroned and magnified in the midst of all, and made both the center and end of all. So David purposed to bring back the Ark, and with it sanctify Jerusalem and make it, indeed, the Holy Hill of God, by enthroning him thereon in connection with that sacred emblem.

I.—A GOOD PURPOSE INAUGURATED.

This lesson should be studied in connection with I. Chron. xiii, xiv, xv, in which we find many details and incidental allusions to the events connected with the removal of the Ark to Jerusalem not recorded in Samuel. It is also true that many, even a great many, of the most splendid Psalms of David were written in connection with this event, notably the sixty-eighth, in which the purpose of David to remove the Ark is set forth, in which we see how deep had been his

thoughtfulness concerning it, and how he had lain awake many nights considering the project. The twenty-fourth Psalm was probably written to commemorate the entrance of the Ark through the gates of the city when it was finally brought in. The remote and Messianic meaning of this is the resurrection of Christ and his entrance in, through the Gates of Glory, to take his place in the Jerusalem which is above.

1.—David's purpose.—This good purpose of David was undertaken after deep and prayerful thought and much pious meditation and planning. His thought was to honor God and exalt him in the kingdom over both himself and his government. His thought was not his own glory, nor simply the establishment of his own throne; but the good of the whole people, for he had clearly perceived that God had raised him up and established him "for his people Israel's sake." Therefore, he consulted with all the chiefs of the people and opened up to them both his thought and his plans concerning the Ark. "And David consulted with the captains of thousands, and hundreds, and every leader." (I. Chron. xiii, 1.) To them he communicated again the wonderful symbolic meaning of the Ark, over which the name of the LORD was called, and in the midst of which, even between the cherubim, he, the Great Jehovah, had been pleased to make his earthly dwelling-place. He reminded them of its past history, which many of the present generation had no doubt forgotten, for during the entire reign of Saul it had not been inquired at. (I. Chron. xiii, 3.) Here was the true-hearted king and shepherd of his people, already instructing them in the things of God, and persuading them to a high and holy attachment to his name, and devoting them to his service. It was thus that Jesus did when he was on earth. Revealing the name and character of God to the people who had forgotten him and were not truly worshiping him, he sought to lead them back to him by means of the true Ark, which was none other than himself, in whom Jehovah dwelt in all fullness.

2.—All the people enlisted.—Not only did David enlist the captains and military leaders, but all the elders of the people. Still more than this, he suggested that all Israel be informed of the purpose and enlisted in the movement, if not by personal presence, at least in heart and sympathy. "Let us break forth abroad unto our brethren everywhere, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also the priests and Levites that are in their cities and in their suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us; and let us bring again the Ark of God to us." (I. Chron. xiii, 2, 3.) Here was a genuine revival of religion proposed. In order to the accomplishment of it, it was not sufficient to David's mind that the officers and chief men alone should

have part in it, but that all should be called in,—the scattered, the wanderers, the backsliders. Let all the people of God go up together to do this good work. One reason why the work of God so often fails is that it is devolved upon the officers and leaders alone to do the work. That is a wise pastor and a wise leader of God's people who enlists all the people.

3.—A joyful and enthusiastic service.—In undertaking this service, they contemplated no formal duty. They put their whole hearts in it. "And David and all Israel played before the Lord with all their might," dancing before the Ark and praising God. (vs. 2; I. Chron. xiii, 8.) It was a goodly sight. Thirty thousand soldiers and a great host, by some estimated at hundreds of thousands, went forth to this service. With gladness and unbounded enthusiasm, they sought to honor the Lord and serve him. No best work can be done unless it be done with gladness and praise and whole-hearted enthusiasm. Duty is a great motive, and without it work can not be done; but duty done without joy and enthusiasm is but a poor and ungrateful service, and usually an unfruitful one.

II.—A GOOD WORK MARRED.

It is a sad story that we have to inspect in connection with this holy purpose this enthusiastic and glad service begun so auspiciously. The presumption of Uzzah brought confusion and dismay to them in the very midst of their enthusiasm. The sudden and terrible judgment of God in striking him dead for putting forth his hand to steady the Ark, came upon them like a clap of thunder and a bursting storm: out of a clear sky, and dispersed them as such a storm would a holiday excursion; nay, worse than that, for it sent confusion and dismay to their hearts. We can not but wonder at this sudden outbreak of God upon Uzzah, and in a sense, upon the whole company, including the king. A little careful study, however, will put us in possession of the secret of it all.

1.—Inexcusable carelessness.—It is strange that, in all his preparation, David had neglected to observe the strict rules which God had enjoined for the removing of the Ark. The Philistines indeed had sent the Ark back on a new cart drawn by cattle; but they knew no better. God's command was that it should be carried about by hand, and that very carefully, by Levites specially appointed to do that service. (Num. iv, 15; vii, 9; x, 21; compare with Ex. xxv, 14.) Had they observed this rule, there would have been no stumbling of cattle down the steep and rocky declivity through which they were pass-

ing, and Uzzah would not have been tempted to rashly put forth his hand to touch the Ark which was forbidden. David afterward—that is, in the next expedition to bring the Ark—reminded the people of this former carelessness and disobedience, and prepared most carefully to carry out the divine instruction. “For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after due order.” (I. Chron. xv, 13.) This was a generous and frank acknowledgment of David of a former mistake, in which he took the full share of the blame to himself. We should learn that, in doing God’s service, we must do it in God’s way; especially are we not to imitate the ways and customs of the heathen, that is, by removing God’s Ark on a cart. Should we look closely into many of the modern methods adopted by the church, we would certainly discover that we were trying to draw the Ark of God on carts, made after the manner of the Philistines.

2.—By presumption.—Uzzah’s sin seems to have been a little one, and was in fact but an impulsive error made with a good intention. Superficial thoughts concerning these things are always dangerous. God has commanded, not good intentions, but obedience. How often has he taught us this lesson! Nadab and Abihu lost their lives for offering strange fire (Lev. x, 1-6); Moses lost the privilege of going into Canaan because he struck the rock instead of speaking to it (Num. xx, 1-13); Achan was slain with all his house, because he took but a little wedge of gold and a single garment from all the spoil of Jericho (Josh. vii); the children of Israel lost their battle with the Philistines because they unhallowedly took the Ark into the battle (I. Sam. iv); the people of Bethshemesh lost their lives because they yielded to a careless curiosity and looked into the Ark. (I. Sam. vi, 19). Saul lost his kingdom because he offered sacrifice himself, instead of waiting for Samuel to come, and spared the spoil of Agag instead of slaying it as he was commanded, though he did it with a (seemingly) pious intention. (I. Sam. xv, 22). King Uzzah was smitten with leprosy in his forehead because he presumed to usurp the priests’ function, and burned incense to the Lord. (II. Chron. xxvi, 16-19.) Surely there are enough incidents to warn us that we may not lightly disobey the Lord. If it is urged that these were mere breaches of ceremonial observances, and that it could not matter much, let me repeat what I have said in another place. “It is a dangerous thing in the service of God to decline from his own institutions. We have to do with a God who is wise to prescribe his own worship; just to require what he has prescribed; and powerful to rebuke and punish what he has not prescribed.” The ceremonial law of the old dispensation points to the

profounder truth of the new covenant. It is the question of meeting God according to his own wise and loving revelation by faith, or setting aside his revelation and taking the matter of worship and approach into his presence into our own hands. Indeed, this whole matter is a lesson that should warn men that nature-worship, or the setting aside revelation to exalt the haughty suggestions of mere human reason, will not be tolerated; not because God is arbitrary, but because he is wise and good, and to allow men to do otherwise would result in the destruction of many misguided and misdirected souls.

3.—By judgment.—The sudden death of Uzzah seems severe. So do all God's judgments. God does not afflict willingly. It is necessary that he should smite with swift and sudden and terrible hand, in order to teach us who are so prone to think our own thoughts, and go our own way to destruction. These sudden judgments are to teach us that God is holy and "will be sanctified;" that sacred things must not be trifled with; that good intentions do not excuse bad actions; that God wants obedience and not mere pretense of service; that in the worship and work of God we must be reverent and careful. God does not now smite in this way; but many an Ananias and Sapphira are bringing on the judgment for their covetousness and lying; many an Achan is surely treasuring up death for himself; many an Uzzah is courting leprosy. Though God's judgment tarry long, it will come at last. Let us be warned, and see to it that we do not set aside God's word and substitute our own wills.

III.—A GOOD WORK ABANDONED.

David was so amazed at this sudden judgment that he was at once thrown off his balance. The whole people seems to have been thrown into a panic. The good work was suddenly abandoned. The Ark was sent into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite and left there, and the people were dispersed. What a sad and miserable outcome of this hopeful, pious, and happy undertaking! So have some of our enthusiastic undertakings come to naught apparently, and we have returned from them disappointed, crestfallen, wounded, and even angry, with fearful questions in our hearts, as if God himself had turned against us when we sought only to honor him and do a good service.

1.—David was displeased.—That is, he was angry with what the Lord had done. He was not angry with himself for neglecting to remove the Ark according to the divine instructions for carrying it; nor was he angry with Uzzah for his act of presumptuous disobedience; but with the Lord himself. Have we not felt the same lurking resent-

men^t in our hearts at what has seemed to us God's unkindness and too great severity? It would have been better had David been angry with himself; or at least, in the face of such a warning from God, stopped and inquired as to the reason. Joshua fell on his face when Israel was defeated at Ai, and inquired of the Lord; and the Lord pointed out the sin of Achan, and bade him put it away. Had David done this he would have been saved much humiliation and suffering. Did we but instantly conclude that there is something wrong in us, rather than that God had wronged us when such things happen, then we would do better. Not always does a sudden overthrow of our plans indicate that there is sin in us; but when the overthrow of our plans is accompanied with some sharp judgment like this, then we may well conclude that sin has been at the bottom of our trouble. Paul and Silas were grievously entreated by the Philippians at first, but when in prison they sang hymns and songs and prayed to God, and he delivered them and turned their defeat into victory.

2.—David afraid.—This was well. When God speaks in this way it is well for us to fear. "Fear God." We need to learn this. Pious as David was, truly as he recognized God's holiness, he still needed to get a deeper lesson. He was afraid to have so dreadful a God in his house or in his city. Well he might be afraid to have God in Jerusalem if he was not to be sanctified there. But if he will bring up the Ark with reverence and godly fear, then nothing but blessing attends. It was not God that he should have been afraid of, but carelessness in his service, and sin. Obed-edom was not afraid to receive the Ark, and he got a great blessing. David learned this later. Let us not be afraid of God when we have sinned, but rather confess our sin and entreat him not to leave us.

3.—David grows sulky.—In a fit of hasty temper, David determined that he would abandon his purpose and abandon the Ark. If this was the way God was to reward his pious endeavor, then he might welcome the Ark who would; but as for him, he would have none of it. How many of God's children have thus fallen into the sulks because they have esteemed themselves badly treated by the Lord! Thus, on the miscarriage of some of their endeavors, or on the coming to them of some loving though severe chastisement. David was not a man after God's own heart in this matter, at least not in this phase of it.

4.—David loses a blessing.—Turning his back on the Ark and upon the Lord, instead of turning it upon his mistakes and his own bad temper, he abandoned the Ark at the house of the Gittite, to whom God brought most abundant blessings. After awhile David learned

his mistake, and very heartily repented his haste and ill-behavior. Many of us have lost great blessings in this very same manner.

IV.—A GOOD WORK REVIVED.

We are very glad indeed that the story does not end with the matter as we see it at this point. How patient is the Lord with the weaknesses of his people! At heart David was true and loyal, simple-hearted and humble. He erred grievously, but time brought him opportunity to think over the matter; and when his own thoughts were quickened by what he heard of the blessings of God to Obededom, he very speedily set himself to the business of rightening the whole matter, which he did most speedily. He planned a second expedition upon a more elaborate scale, after an interval of three months. By reference to I. Chron. xv, we learn that David had made a careful study of the ceremonial directions for removing the Ark, and prepared minutely to carry them out. Not only so far as he was concerned, but he instructed the priests and Levites in their especial duties. Then, all things being in readiness, with the multitudes of Israel, he went forth again with no less gladness, but with even more, and brought the Ark to Zion and placed it there, blessing the people and rewarding them for their co-operation, and showing himself to have been not only a true and great king, but an humble and enthusiastic worshiper, and a hearty lover of his people, for whose sake God had raised him up and blessed him. It will repay us to read clear through to the end of the chapter for the conclusion of this beautiful and suggestive story.

LESSON XLII.

DAVID'S PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING.—II. Sam. vii, 18–29.

GOLDEN TEXT.—In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.—I. Thess. v, 8.

Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God besides thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Lord, art become their God. And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee a house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.—II. Sam. vii, 18–29.

David, more than any other monarch of the olden time, was a man of action. He was not content with past achievements; he must be planning for other, and better, and greater things. He had now been some years established in his kingdom; he had built for himself a splendid house, and was then inhabiting it; he had surrounded himself with a thoroughly-organized court. In fact, for the first time in the history of Israel there was a kingdom. Saul, after all, was but a king in name, while in fact he was simply a military chieftain; but David was every inch a king. Yet was not his heart lifted up; his thoughts were not alone of his own glory and greatness, nor were they

simply the thoughts and ambitions of a patriot; he had something else in view than the greatness of Israel as a nation. Surveying his own magnificent dwelling and thinking of God's goodness to him, he naturally began to compare his house and its elegant surroundings with the badger-skin tent in which God dwelt over the Ark of the Covenant, and his heart smote him. He was immediately moved with a pious and honorable desire to build a permanent temple for the ark of God—in other words, a house for the Lord. This purpose he opens to Nathan, the prophet (who, for the first time, now appears in our history), who, without inquiring of the Lord, encourages David to proceed with his laudable purpose. It is not long, however, before Nathan gets a different word from the Lord, and comes with it to David.

God is not unmindful of David's pious purpose to honor him with a house, but reminds him that hitherto Jehovah has not been dissatisfied with the simple tent in which he had dwelt for more than five hundred years, and, for purposes not here explained in words, but plain to the student who reads between the lines of history, declines the purpose of David to build him a house. Coupled with this declinature, God reveals to David, through the prophet, his own purpose toward David and his family. God will not have David build a house for him, but, on the other hand, God will build a house for David. Not a house made with hands, in which he should personally dwell, but a dynasty, a house in the sense of an endless succession in the kingdom which God had now begun to establish. "I will set up thy seed after thee which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and will establish his kingdom." (vs. 12.) This was a most wonderful promise. The permanency of Eastern dynasties was a thing unknown; the reigning families were always beset by intrigue and treachery. One family or military chieftain succeeded another in quick succession in the East, so that no monarch looked to see his house perpetuated in power beyond one, or at most two, generations. For an example of this, only consider the rapid succession of dynasties in the revolted kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. Now this astonishing revelation comes to David that his house should last forever; in an unbroken line his sons should reign until at last Messiah should come, and in him the everlasting kingdom would be established over the whole earth, and all nations finally absorbed in it. When the promised seed comes in the distant centuries, "He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." (vs. 13.) There can be no doubt that this refers to the Messiah—Jesus, who did come at last, born of David's line, and in himself built the true tabernacle. In fact, he was the true Temple in whom God found a most glorious dwelling-place.

In this revelation we have two distinct and beautiful lessons:

1. Though God sometimes refuses the prayers we ask of him for reasons wise in themselves and good for us, he has in reserve for us something better than we asked. It was so in this case. David's heart was full of a great desire to build a house for God. This God refused to allow him to do; but revealed his purpose to hear him in his desire, and in answering his prayer in a way different from his thought, do something so much greater and better that it dumfounded David, and overwhelmed him with a sense of his own insignificance and God's greatness and goodness. It is often so with us. We have seen with disappointment sometimes that our prayers (specifically) have been declined; but upon the heels of our disappointment God has done a better thing, so that we have thanked him for his refusal and blessed him for his wonderful goodness. We may learn also this lesson: That he who has it in his heart to do a good thing for God, will be sure to have a better thing done for himself. David proposed to build a house for God, but instead, God built a house for him.

2. That Jesus the Messiah is the true end of all God's purpose, and wonderful doings among men, and in him we are to see all our highest aspirations fulfilled, and all our blessings confirmed. There can be no doubt as to the reference in the thirteenth verse pointing to Jesus; nor that David got a true glimpse of the meaning. In Peter's address on the day of Pentecost he says to David: That he knew "that God had sworn to him with an oath, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne." (Acts ii, 30.) Nothing short of this prophetic glimpse can account for the overwhelming and wonder-stricken enthusiasm manifested throughout this wonderful prayer. So here we see that David as well as Abraham "saw Christ's day and was glad." Let us be glad and rejoice that we have ourselves seen Christ coming into the world according to the Scriptures. He is no accidental person, evolved by some unintelligent freak of nature out of a degenerate line of ancestors, but the very Son of God coming after the flesh in David's line.

I.—DAVID'S ADORATION.

The revelation of God to David by the prophet Nathan so completely overwhelmed him with amazement and unspeakable wonder of gladness, that he speaks no more of his cherished project; but just gave himself up to a rush of adoring emotions in which he sought to pour out his soul to God. "David went in and sat down before the Lord." Whether he went into the tabernacle or into his own private

chamber is not clear. It does not matter. We often say of certain communications that are made to us, that "it fairly took our breath away." Something like this happened to David. His strength left him and he had to sit down. He could not walk about or stand. He just went in before the Lord and sat down. This in itself was at once a most expressive gesture of humble wonder and of child-like simplicity. For though David never in all his life lost sight of the immeasurable distance between himself and Jehovah, yet was his heart so simple and child-like before God that he nestled up to him as a child would to his father who had surprised him with the communication of some great pleasure in store for him. "The content of this thanksgiving prayer of David was like a clear glass, wherein we see into the innermost depths of his heart. His soul wholly taken up with the divine revelation," poured itself out in the confused and broken utterances that follow, and finally found itself incapable of speech. Let us note some of the elements of his adoring worship.

1.—His humility.—Having noted the wonder that filled his heart at the amazing vision of greatness designed for him and his house, his first intelligent emotion was that of deep humility. "Who am I, O Lord, and what is my house?" When he thought on what God had promised, viz., that he should be the head of that family and house from whom Christ should spring, and in whom the everlasting kingdom should be established, which was indeed the end and purpose of God in all his revelations and dealings with man, nay in his very creation, and remembered that he was but a poor shepherd lad, the least of all his father's house, and that God had designed this for him when he sent Samuel to him to anoint him, a profound sense of his insignificance came to him, and his humility knew no bounds. This emotion of humility was characteristic of David's thought. This is seen in Psalms viii, 5, and cxliv, 3. This humility of thought he applies not only to himself in these Psalms, but to the whole race of man, and can not help wondering at the grace of God in considering them and designing them for such great destiny. We are also reminded of Jacob's wonder under somewhat similar circumstances. (Gen. xxxii, 10.) In view of what God's grace has done for us in Christ, and is still doing for us, and will yet do for us, it is becoming in us that we should share with David in this spirit of humility.

2.—His gratitude.—Along with his humility there is the manifestation of boundless gratitude. A gratitude that reached back into the past, that covered the present, and comprehended the future. He thought of all God's past leading, how he had chosen him and preserved him through so many trials and vicissitudes; how he had now at last

established him in his kingdom and given him victory over all his enemies; and then, still thinking on the future glories reserved to his house in the promised seed and the everlasting kingdom, he was grateful for the goodness promised for a great while to come. (vs. 19.) The expression, "And is this the manner of men, O Lord?" is a very obscure one, the exact meaning of which I am unable to determine; but it was certainly intended to emphasize the emotions of wonder and gratitude then filling his whole being. May we not also come and sit down before the Lord, and in like manner pour out our gratitude. For has not the past of our lives been a wonder of grace; and is not our present estate in grace "being justified and saved, and made children of God," one to excite liveliest emotions of grateful love? And when we think of what is yet in reserve for us, what can we do else than praise him? Paul once grouped the past, present, and future together in giving thanks to God. "Who delivered us from so great death, and doth deliver; and in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." (II. Cor. i, 10.) All God's mercies comprehend the past, present, and future, for he is in Christ the Living One, who was dead, and behold, is alive forever more."

3.—His speechless open-heartedness.—"And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord, knowest thy servant." He could not express himself in words. Nothing but the throbbing silence of his heart would serve him in this moment of overwhelming gratitude. He delights to lay his heart open to God and ask him to see for himself in there all his emotions. There come times to us, both in prayer and thanksgiving, and in the desire for communion, when words do not suffice. It is enough, and the only thing we can do, for us to sit still before the Lord and silently lay our hearts open to him.

4.—His recognition of God's grace.—In all that God had done for him in the past, in his present exalted position, and especially in the great promises just made to him, David can see nothing but grace. In himself there is no sufficient reason and explanation of this boundless goodness. "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these things, to make thy servant know them." Now it occurs to him. According to God's own heart entirely, have all these great things which God had done to him, and now shown to him, been done. Here is the beginning of that splendid song: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake." (Ps. cxv, 1.) "Surely the Lord hath loved us, because the Lord hath loved us." The only reason for it is in himself, and not in us. This is both encouraging to us in view of our utter unworthiness, which sometimes rises up to overwhelm us with fear,

but it is the only true vision of truth, and the only conception of the motive of God's dealing with us that will keep us humble before him, and call out our gratitude to the full.

5.—His boundless praise.—Finally David breaks out into a sentence of praise to God for it all. The goodness of God and his grace leads him up to a contemplation of his character and being. "Wherefore thou art great, O Lord." Great in thyself, for only a great God could act in this way toward men. "For there is none like thee." Thou art incomparable with any other god. No conception of Deity by man has ever compared with the actual revelation which God has made of himself. This is especially true as God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. He is incomparably the greatest and most wonderful conception of man the world has ever known. No ideal ever approached him before he came, and since he came into the world, there have been no attempts to idealize human character. He leaves nothing even for the imagination of man to conceive. "There is none like the Lord our God." (Ex. viii, 10; Is. xlv, 5, 18, 22.) "And there is not a God beside thee." Here is a declaration of God's aloneness. All the gods of the heathen are idols; mere vanities; the idle and empty fancies of their thoughts. "There is but one God, and beside him there is none other." This David now perceived afresh, and declared it in his psalm of praise. "According to all that we have heard with our ears." This greatness, and incomparability, and aloneness of God as he contemplated him now, corresponds with all that may be fairly gathered from what had come down to them by tradition of him in connection with his past acting with his people. So surely may we conclude who have the heart and mind to study our God in the light of his gracious and wonderful dealings with us and his people in all the past of their history.

II.—DAVID'S PRAISE FOR ISRAEL.

David now passes, in his grateful thoughts, from himself to Israel as a whole. For great as was God's goodness to him and wonderful as was the vision as to him and his house, he now bethinks himself that, after all, he is but the representative and head of Israel as a nation. Not that this identity with the people lessened his individuality, or even obscured it. The really devout man is always an unselfish and large-hearted one. He does not see in himself a favorite above all, but considers himself as being one among many. The true child of God, while emphasizing his individuality, does not fail "to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." Looking back

over Israel's history and inheritance in God's grace, David begins now to widen the scope of his praise, and calls upon all the people to join in with him, for the blessing to him and his house was only a step toward blessing to them. Their past, as his, had been a wonderful history of grace and goodness from God. He enumerates several points in which he sees this great fact.

1.—They are the chosen people.—And in that fact they are the greatest among all the nations. Surely, this is true. There never was so wonderful a people as the Jewish people. The history of no nation has made such an indelible impression upon the world as that of Israel. It is even apparent now. Though for the time being they are under chastisement, yet are they preserved for glory yet to be revealed in and through them. Miraculously preserved amid the nations, they are still the monuments of God's goodness, as they are the examples of his severity. The secret of all this wonderful history is found in that God has chosen them "for himself;" therefore, the other things which David mentions follow.

2.—Their wonderful redemption.—Did ever a people have such a beginning? Redeemed, by a series of astonishing miracles, from Egypt, whose proud king God overthrew, and for whose passage into their land he made a way through the sea and brought them up through the wilderness, and established them in their land by a series of great and terrible things.

3.—Their wonderful association.—God did not simply redeem them, but he confirmed them to himself for a people forever, and in a pre-eminent way made himself their God. This he chose to do of his grace. David would have them consider this and praise their God for it, as he was praising him for his personal blessings. In the future, this wonderful people will absorb all other nations, though all nations together have not been able to absorb them, nor yet to destroy them.

III.—DAVID'S PRAYER

David, now having finished his adorations and praise, turns and pours out his heart to God in a great prayer, in which he pleads with him to fulfill all his promises which have just been made to him. Not that he doubted God's truth, but that he delighted to plead his word and promise. This is a right spirit, and one that pleases God above all things. God promises, and then will have us inquire of him concerning the things which he has promised. In this great prayer of David we have a most excellent model of prayer. The construction of it was, of course, unconscious; that is, it was a prayer straight from

David's heart, and we can not but believe, like all true prayer, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

1.—The warrant of his prayer.—This was the word and promise of God. "The word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and his house establish it forever, and do as thou hast promised." This was his warrant. "Thy word;" "Do as thou hast said." Luther used to say that with a plain promise he could "put God in a corner." He can not deny his word. Let us always plead that if we would prevail.

2.—The end of his prayer.—It was not alone for a selfish consideration that David prayed. He did not separate the blessing which he asked for himself and his house from the honor and glory of God. No true prayer can be offered that does not seek the honor of God's name in the thing sought as well as the thing itself. Therefore, David prayed: "And let thy name be magnified forever." So let us always pray.

3.—The inspiration of his prayer.—"Therefore hath thy servant found it in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." His prayer came straight from his heart, but it was inspired by the revelation of God's purpose toward him. "For thou, O Lord God of hosts, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house." Still the word of God, how he magnified it!

4.—The confidence of his prayer.—This confidence had none other ground. "For thou art my God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised." What a ringing of the changes on the word of God! What a bold and confident appeal to God's character! With Paul, David would have said: "I know whom I have trusted." And again: "Sirs, I believe God."

5.—The fullness of his prayer.—He will have nothing less than God had promised. "Therefore, now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue forever before thee; for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it" (here is the appeal to the word again), "and with thy blessing, let the house of thy servant be blessed forever." We know that this prayer of David was answered in the establishment of his house, but especially in the subsequent coming of the promised seed, and the full measure of it will be seen in the final establishment of the house of Israel and David in the earth when the Lord shall come again.

LESSON XLIII.

SIN, FORGIVENESS, AND PEACE.—Psalm xxii, 1-11

GOLDEN TEXT.—Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.—Rom. v, 1.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.—Psalms xxxii, 1-11.

The historical occasion of this Psalm, as well as the famous fifty-first, or so-called penitential psalm of David, was his rebuke by the Prophet Nathan, on account of his grievous and terrible sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite and his beautiful wife Bathsheba. The whole dreadful story is recorded in the eleventh chapter of Second Samuel. The twelfth chapter gives us an account of the visit of Nathan the prophet to the king, and his striking parable; of David's indignation at the supposed transgressor; of Nathan's stern reproof when he applied the parable of the rich stranger, who took the one ewe lamb of the poor man, to the king himself; and of David's prompt and humble confession of sin. The penitential psalms, especially the fifty-first, give us a deep insight into David's bitter sorrow, his humble penitence, and his earnest prayer for forgiveness. The psalm which forms the basis of our study to-day, is a rehearsal of that time of penitence, confession, and prayer, together with the glad joy of forgiveness, and is full of instruction concerning God's method of grace with a sinner who is penitent before him. Luther used to call this and the

fifty-first, the one hundred and thirtieth, and the one hundred and forty-second, the Pauline psalms, because they contain in them the same great doctrine of grace which underlies all Paul's teachings. There is such a perfect portraiture of the experience of every true Christian in these psalms, and there is such perfection of teaching in this one, that they carry with them the force of self-evident inspiration, that in all ages Christian people have sought unto them to find the words and thoughts which exactly express their own feelings. As for the teaching of this psalm, it is so compact and beautiful that nothing could be better with which to teach a sinner the way back to God, whether he be a sinful child of God or an original and impenitent unbeliever. The psalm is composed of two parts; the first is an outburst of praise for forgiveness, and the second is a rehearsal of the six steps by which David made his way back to the favor of God and the joy of the Lord.

I.—THE BEATITUDE OF THE PENITENT SINNER.

This is the second beatitude found among the psalms. We do not mean that there is no blessedness spoken of to man else before this psalm after the first one, but that it describes the second state of blessedness that comes to a believing man. The first psalm tells of the blessedness of the man who walks in righteousness before God. He shall be like a tree planted, and whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper. If they only whose delights are in the law of the Lord, who delight themselves in it day and night, who avoid all evil company, and do no sin, possess this blessedness, how few of us would be able to claim that benediction. This psalm, however, tells a poor fallen and sinful child of God how he may make his way out of sinfulness, and transgression, and iniquity, and back to God and blessedness. Therefore is it so dear to us. Not that it is to be taken as an encouragement to sin, or as a promise before sinning that we may be restored, and so made the reason or justification of presumptuous sin; but it is a promise to those who have sinned, and who, broken under the misery of their iniquity, would else be in despair. The first two verses tell the story of sin and forgiveness on account of which the beatitude is spoken. The psalmist begins with the end of his blessing, for the reason that only a man who has been forgiven, can tell to others the steps toward it. We have here an analytical statement of sin and its sovereign remedy.

1.—Concerning sin.—Four words are used to portray the offenses of man against God and his own soul. *First*, he mentions "transgression." The significance of this word is to *cross over a line*. This is

what all sin does: it crosses the line of God's commandments and breaks the bounds of moral order. God has, according to the principles of eternal righteousness, set bounds to man's actions. To cross these bounds is to transgress not only the commandment, but the principles of righteousness of which the law is but a transcript. Surely to have dishonored his faithful friend's unprotected wife, and then to have caused him to be murdered, was a most fearful transgression. And yet let not any one rejoice himself against David, because he has not actually committed the sin of adultery and of murder, for our Lord has taught us that the sin of these things lies not only in the actual doing of them, but in the lustful thought and in the murderous hatred that lurks in the heart and is indulged in the disposition. Therefore an unclean thought indulged in is the transgression of the first law against which David was guilty, hatred indulged in against another is the transgression of the second law against which David offended. *Second*, he mentions "sin." The significance of this word is *to miss a mark*. God has not only set bounds across which we must not go, but he has set up a mark at which we must aim our lives. Righteousness is both negative and positive. Not to do and to do are the forms under which all law is written. David in his sin had missed the mark of God's requirement in maintaining and cultivating positive righteousness of character. In this also we have come short. So says the Apostle: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Whilst we contemplate David's sin, let us do so as looking in a mirror in which our own is also reflected. *Third*, he speaks of "iniquity." The significance of this word is, *that which is turned out of its proper course or situation*; hence, *any thing that is morally distorted and perverted*. This must refer to the original corruption of the nature of man, out of which proceed all evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and such like. (Matt. xv, 18, 19.) This is the real source of our sin and transgression. At the beginning man was turned out of his proper course and condition by yielding to the temptation of the devil, and hence his nature became perverted from the true and faithful worship and obedience of God. In the fifty-first psalm David alludes to this corruption of his nature in terms of deep and bitter sorrow: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." This is the root of the whole matter; and though God does not hold us guilty of original sin, it is nevertheless a fact to be recognized and deplored, and if not confessed and denied with all the actual sins which flow from it, and for which we are held guilty, it will be a constant source of cumulative evil to us. Hence we need not only expiation for our guilt, but regeneration from our inward corruptions.

Fourth, he speaks of "guile." The significance of this word is, *fraud and deceit*. It is the same word in effect as "bait," that which is used to allure fish, and which is placed over the point of a hook which it covers up, and thus deceives the fish to its destruction. There are few men in whose character there is no guile. Certainly David had both sought to deceive himself, his two victims, and God. The reproof of Nathan uncovered his soul before his own eyes, and exposed his secret and wicked intention. What a picture of unrighteousness and corruption is here brought to view? How it makes us shrink from ourselves, and loathe ourselves in hatred even before God. Surely that must be a great salvation which rescues and delivers us from all these things.

2.—*Concerning salvation or the soul's blessedness.*—No wonder David says the man who is saved from all this is a blessed man. He matches or covers these four phases of sin with four phases of God's saving grace. *First*, he speaks of *the forgiveness of our transgression*. The meaning of the word forgiveness is "to send away." Thus God sends away from his own heart and from our own our transgressions. He does not hold them against us, and in effect he bids us to let them depart out of our consciousness as offenses against him. Of old the scape-goat taught this lesson to Israel. On him was laid our transgressions, and he bore them away into a land of forgetfulness. Many beautiful passages of Scripture are illustrative of this. Our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west; they are blotted out as a thick cloud; they are cast into the depths of the sea; they are cast behind God's back; they come no more into his remembrance. Surely he is a blessed man who sees in Jesus Christ the forgiveness of his transgression. (Eph. i, 7; Acts xiii, 38.) *Second*, he speaks of our sin being *covered*. Sin is odious and abominable, and must be put out of God's sight. God covered the nakedness of our first parents, who vainly attempted to do it themselves, but did not succeed either so far as God's eyes were concerned or their own consciousness. God covered the Hebrews in Egypt with the blood of the paschal lamb, and thus protected them from the stroke of the destroying angel. God covered the ark in which the law was deposited with the mercy seat, and thus saved the people from its damning curse. So he covers our sin; hides it from his sight; not by any fiction of words, but by an actual propitiation. He gives us a protection against sin in the blood of Jesus Christ, and covers us with his righteousness as with a garment. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." He is the only effectual covering for the sinful soul. *Third*, he speaks of the *non-imputation of iniquity*. That is, he does not now count to or against us the iniquity of our corrup-

tions. He regards the believer who comes to him as being freed from his iniquity, and does not lay it up against him. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their transgressions." This is also a true word, and is to be taken at its full value. The reason why God can do this is found in the fact that he has made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin for us. Let none doubt this, for it is everywhere asserted in God's word. The natural heart can not bear this blessed truth, and seeks in every way to avoid and evade it, but it is most blessed to the believer. *Fourth*, he speaks of the removal of guile from the heart. This not in express terms, but by implication. For by nature there is no man in whose heart there is not guile, nor can a man unaided free himself from the deep deceitfulness of his heart. God by his spirit comes in, and so regenerates a penitent sinner that he who was full of fraud and deceit becomes guileless and honest. Thus we see in this the culminating work of God's grace. It first forgives our transgressions, covers our sin, imputes not to us iniquity, and then it regenerates the heart, and so makes the inner character of man correspond to the blessings of grace that are bestowed upon him. Atonement and regeneration are the two fundamental blessings of grace. One has to do with our redemption, the other with our sanctification. One is done for us by Christ on the cross; the other is done in and to us by the Spirit in our very hearts. Let us with David sing this beatitude of praise to God for his so great salvation.

II.—SIX STEPS TO THE BELIEVER'S BLESSEDNESS.

David having first announced the blessedness of the believer, now proceeds to tell us out of his own bitter but blessed experience how he was brought to this state of beatitude.

1.—**Conviction.**—At first, before Nathan came to him, he kept silent before God concerning his sin. He was miserably wretched about it, but he did not confess it nor acknowledge it. When sin is shut up in our soul and we are silent about it to God, then our bones wax old. The sense of youthful health gives way to the sense of decrepit old age. The heart is full of roaring. Heavy sighs escape the lips, but not words; just miserable groanings. This not for a moment, but all the day long. His moisture was turned into the drought of summer. He perceived that the fruit of the Spirit was no longer in him, and his soul was parched and dry as the cracked and baked ground of the summer field. This was not a result of natural conscience, but the hand of God was upon him day and night. It is only when God lays

the hand of his convicting Spirit upon us that we really realize our sins.

2.—Confession.—How long David continued in this state of mind we do not know, but we do not believe it was long. The misery of it was too intolerable. He had at last to break his silence and cry out to God in confession. He acknowledged his sins, and not only unto Nathan but unto God, for it was against God, and God only, that he had sinned, and done that horrible evil in his sight. In his confession he did not hide or excuse any thing. He made a clean breast of it. He confessed his transgressions to the Lord, that is, to Jehovah, the Saviour God. It is of no good to confess sins to God simply; they must be confessed to God in Christ, who only can forgive. Let us remember this, that God begins to cover our sins when we uncover them before him in confession.

3.—Forgiveness.—The forgiveness of God is eternally in his heart; it is formally announced to the whole world in Jesus Christ, and it is experimentally known by the believer just as soon as he is ready as a penitent confessor to claim it. Then, as with David, the worst sinner may say for himself: "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." What is there more blessed than this, to know that God has put out of his heart the offense of our sin and sent away off our soul the horrible iniquity of it? "There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared." Not that we should be afraid of God, but that he should be revered with a holy and humble fear; for how great must be God who can, and does, thus forgive sin, even the very iniquity of it!

4.—Prayer.—David speaks of prayer in this connection. "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee." That is, because there is forgiveness with God, every one that has a mind to return to him, should be encouraged to pray unto him. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." And let him do it in a "time when God may be found." For there comes a time when the "acceptable year of the Lord" will come to an end, and "the day of vengeance of our God" will dawn upon an ungodly world, and there will be no opportunity for prayer to a forgiving God. "Surely, in the floods of great waters, they shall not come nigh unto thee." This must be an allusion backward to the helpless condition of the drowning antediluvians, who, despising the warning of Noah and his ark of safety, could not enter it after once Noah was shut in and the judgment was upon them; and forward to the time when "once the Master of the house is risen up" and the day of grace is over. Isaiah makes a similar allusion to the

time of prayer, and salvation, and the time of judgment when that day of grace is over. (xxviii, 16, 17.) "Judgment also will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place."

5.—Protection.—Having made his confession and been assured of forgiveness, the Psalmist now sings of the safety and protection he has in God. "Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." This is another step farther into the very heart of God. "Safe to the rock, that is higher than I," sings this rejoicing sinner whom God has saved. So may we all sing who have "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us" in Jesus Christ our Lord, who is none other than the Jehovah whose praises David sings in this beautiful Psalm. "Hidden, preserved from trouble, and compassed about with songs of deliverance." Who would not be the child of such a God, "who keepeth mercy for thousands and forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin!"

6.—Instruction, teaching, and guidance.—Here are three more blessings in the pathway to blessedness. *First*, "I will instruct thee." That is, "I will make thee *understand*." The child of God needs to be instructed and made to understand the things of God. Only an intelligent Christianity can be a strong one. Man may instruct, but God only can open the eyes of the understanding and make us wise. The emphasis of this blessing is on the fact that with instruction God gives understanding. *Second*, "I will teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." That is, not only the way, but in the way; not only how to go, but as you go. Every step of the Christian's way is an occasion for fresh teaching; and what a blessing it is to have God for our teacher! He has given to us the Holy Spirit, to be our Paraclete for instruction and teaching. He will henceforth never leave us, nor forsake us to our own ignorance and lack of wisdom. *Third*, "I will guide thee with mine eye." Here we have the assurance of God's continuous watchfulness. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ear is open to their cry." We may not always be conscious of the Lord's presence in the way, but we may always be sure that his guiding eye is overlooking us. He not only sees us, but he sees our way from the beginning to the end. Moreover, he will so teach and instruct us that his guidance will be as gentle as that of one who only has to indicate the way to us by a glance of an eye. Therefore, the following instruction: "Be not as the horse or the mule, which have no understanding," and have to be controlled by bit and bridle. Know

that it is as free and intelligent and loving pupils and children, God would deal with us. Let us not be fractious and stubborn and untractable in the way, lest he have to come nigh us as the trainer of unbroken mules, and put bit and bridle of severe discipline upon us.

7.—The joy of the believer.—The Psalm ends as it begins, with a note of gladness. First, the psalmist contrasts the happy estate of the believer with that of the wicked. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." This is like another saying: "Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him; but say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him." And again: "Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." The Psalm ends with an exhortation to "be glad in the Lord," and "to shout for joy." Many of God's children are afraid to rejoice in the goodness and grace of God and in the possession they have in himself. Let your joys abound. God will have us be glad in him. So the Apostle: "Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice." Not only this, but let the upright in heart, those who have been made so, shout for joy. There are those who say that the joys of salvation should be had in secret; that there should be no outward sign or sound of enthusiasm. So did David's wife, when he danced and sang in the front of the procession which brought up the ark to Jerusalem; but though he were a king, yet did he not think it unbecoming to let his gladness be known, even though it violated some of the proprieties of the cold-hearted and backslidden people. It is to be feared that we have given in too much, in this particular, to the conventionalities of the unspiritual and worldly people.

LESSON XLIV.

DAVID'S REBELLIOUS SON.—II. Sam. xv, 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.—Exodus xx, 12.

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord. And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.—II. Sam. xv, 1-12.

We have in the story before us the beginning of the shattering of the theocratic kingdom, and the disruption of David's house and family, brought about by the crimes of his two eldest sons. We are, however, to look behind the apparent cause of this downfall of David to the real one, which was in David's own sin. The bitter fruits of his unholy amour with Bathsheba and his cruel murder of Uriah are now being pressed to his own lips, and he is compelled to eat them. David had been forewarned of this by the prophet: "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house; because thou hast de-

spised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. * * * Thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." (II. Sam. xii, 10-12.) The intervening chapters between this one and the last lesson give us the particulars of the course of events after David's sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. After his rebuke by the prophet Nathan, and his repentance, we see the beginning of trouble in the death of David's child, the fruit of his sin with Bathsheba (xii); the horrible sin of Amnon with his half-sister Tamar (xiii), in which David must have seen as in a mirror a magnified and distorted image of his own sin; then comes the murder of Amnon, David's oldest son, by Absalom, his best beloved one, as an act of revenge for the former's dishonor of his sister Tamar (xiii, 28), in which David must have seen the horrible parody of his murder of Uriah. Then follows the banishment of Absalom from the city and country, his partial forgiveness, and final restoration to Jerusalem and to the favor of the king, through the intrigue of Joab and his own inherent force of character. David loved Absalom with the love of a foolish and fond father, and allowed it to get the better of his sense of justice. Indeed, it was David's weakness in not first punishing Amnon, that led up to his murder by Absalom; then it was his further weakness in not punishing Absalom that led up to the conspiracy and rebellion of the latter. Let us not be too harsh in our judgment of David's conduct, for we can readily imagine that he who had been so guilty himself, and so mercifully dealt with, would be reluctant to take severe measures with his own sons for doing no worse than he himself had done. Nevertheless, our actions ought not to be controlled by sentiment when sentiment comes between a violator of law and justice.

The whole sad story is fraught with many important lessons; chiefly these: (1) We may be sure that our sin will find us out, and bring home to us a frightful harvest of evil consequences. (2) Though God forgives the iniquity of our sins, such forgiveness does not prevent the natural consequences of it from appearing. A drunkard may be forgiven and saved from the guilt and power of his drunkenness, but such forgiveness does not prevent the physical consequences that follow in the body, or some of the moral and collateral consequences that follow in the after life of him who has been the drunkard. It is so with other sins. (3) That a too fond and weak indulgence of our children in their sins and follies will not only bring trouble and sorrow upon ourselves, but ruin and destruction upon them.

I.—THE CONSPIRACY OF ABSALOM.

Absalom was the only son of royal birth on both sides which David had. This may, in part, account for his haughty and imperious nature, and also for his ambitious pretensions in the matter of the kingdom without regard to the succession as determined by his father. Personally, he was a magnificent man, particularly in respect of his manly beauty and kingly aspect. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty; from the sole of his foot, even to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him." (xiv, 25.) One particular and chief characteristic of his beauty was his magnificent hair, which flowed in luxuriant locks down over his shoulders. It was his pride, and the pride of the people. It was carefully kept and regularly weighed, and the weight of it bulletined to the people. This same hair, in which he took so much pride, was the same in which he was finally caught, and by which he lost his life. It is usually so. Absalom was, in fact, the pride and idol of Jerusalem, and especially of the generation which knew not David in his youth, and had no vivid remembrances of his splendid career. Even Joab was particularly attached to him until he foresaw his imperious character, and perhaps suspected his designs; and especially until his rash and lawless act in burning his field and domineering over him in the matter of affecting his final recall to the king's court and favor. Ahithophel, also the king's familiar friend and chief counselor, was finally won over to Absalom, and no doubt enabled him to carry out his conspiracy to a successful issue. It seems that Absalom was an ungrateful son, and perhaps harbored some feeling of resentment against his royal father for his banishment and disgrace, which was not eradicated by his subsequent favor. He had forgotten his father, and his obedience to him certainly, and given himself up to his ambitious schemes. We can only entertain feelings of contempt and reprobation for the doings of this ungrateful and wicked son, who, to further his own ambitious schemes, planned the overthrow of his father's authority, and the usurpation of his kingdom, even at the expense of his father's death. In pursuing his purpose, we note the unscrupulous ability which he displayed, even though it was the ability of a demagogue, combined with that of an imperious and able mind. From the time of his restoration to court and favor, he began deliberately to push his ambitious and wicked purpose.

1.—**His ostentation.**—"He prepared him chariots and horses." This was an estate of display which, indeed, was a mark of royalty among the nations around Israel, but which was forbidden by the law

of God. Saul, indeed, had done this, but David never. Absalom had, perhaps, conceived the idea of this kind of royal display while in exile at the court of a foreign king; and without doubt for the purpose of inspiring the pride of the people of Jerusalem. Of late David had been in retirement a very great deal, and it is supposed that at this time also he was ill with that grievous illness of which he makes such pathetic mention in some of his psalms (xxxviii, xxxix, xli). These circumstances were favorable to Absalom's designs. The lack of display and regal splendor at the court and in the habits of David, together with the growing pride and wealth of the nation, and especially Jerusalem, the new capital, created in the people a desire to have a state of "glory" which would cause them to be compared favorably with the splendor of the courts of the kings round about them. Absalom took advantage of this, and by his chariots and horses, and his body-guard and forerunners, kindled this vain desire among the people into a flame, and centered their eyes and thoughts on him. While the elders would look upon all this as a mere vain display on the part of the prince, the people generally, no doubt encouraged by Absalom's retainers, would begin to say, "What a splendid king he will make for us when the old king is dead." This was what Absalom desired them to be thinking. Once they had gotten it well into their mind that he was to be his father's successor, he would find means to hasten that succession, not waiting upon the slow and halting steps of death to take the king out of his way.

2.—His diligence.—"He rose up early." It is not usually the custom of princes to rise up early; but Absalom had a purpose to perform. It was the custom in Eastern countries for the judges to rise up early and sit in the gates to attend to the cases of the people which might be brought to them. Absalom imitated their example, that the people might see how painstaking he was about their concerns. For four years (for so we must understand the time of this plotting, rather than forty, as in verse 7, which is generally conceded to be an error), he continued his patient purpose. What a pity it is that the true servants of God are not as diligent and painstaking as those who plot the ruin and overthrow of the kingdom of heaven! The enemies of Christ and religion are up early and late to do their wicked works, while we too often slumber and sleep and take our ease, and suffer the things of the kingdom to fall into neglect and even ruin. We keep the churches open a part of one day of the week, while the devil's agents keep the rum-shops and places of sinful amusement open day and night all through the week, and outnumber the churches by ten to one all over the land.

3.—He courts the people.—It was the time-honored custom among Eastern kings to sit in the gate of the palace every day, early in the morning, to hear the complaints of the people, and settle all matters of controversy which might arise between them. If the king did not attend to these matters in person, he delegated judges to do it for him and in his name. For some reason this matter had either fallen into disuse, or was poorly attended to. It was Absalom's custom to resort to the gate of judgment and put himself in the way of the people, and pretend great and tender interest in all their affairs. Very subtly he plays his game. His thought was to point out to them how greatly they needed a man in authority who would take a real interest in their affairs, and attend to them with promptness and equity. Thus he sought to contrast his own zeal with that of the sluggish indifference of the king his father. Of course he did not directly say any thing to disparage his father, but he did that indirectly, and at the same time set himself in prominent contrast. This was an appeal to their sense of need, and a subtle suggestion as to how it might be supplied. (1) He would flatter their vanity also by going up to them one by one as they came, and courteously and kindly asking them one by one, "Of what city they were," and draw from them their name and estate. This must have greatly pleased the humble people, or encouraged the greater ones who approached the judgment-seat, to have this splendid prince, not only interested in the welfare of the people in general, but in each one of them particularly. (2) He would take sides with every man in his matter of controversy. "See," he would say, after he had inquired into their cases, "thy matters are good and right." This, of course, would win them to him; for who would not desire to have the favor and patronage of a powerful and popular prince? (3) He criticised the present government. "But there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee." He intimated not a little broadly that the people's just causes were being neglected by reason of the carelessness or indifference of the king. No music can be so sweet to the ears of the unstable multitude as to hear good of themselves and ill of their governors. This music Absalom sung to the people in honeyed words and dulcet tones. (4) He broadly hints to the people that it would be well for them that he were in power. Step by step he advances his cause. "O, that I were made judge in the land, that every man that had suit or cause, might come unto me that I might do him justice." He did not say, "O, that I were king." That would be too broad and would expose his cloven foot. He did not go to the king his father and suggest to him the need of reform in this matter and his readiness and willingness to undertake in his name

to strengthen his government; but he said it to the people, and in such a way as to increase their discontent with the king and his government, and at the same time increase his popularity with the people and put notions in their head. (5) Finally, he grossly flattered them by an act of condescension which went straight to their foolish hearts. "And it was so that when any man came nigh to him to do his obeisance, he put forth his hand and took him and kissed him." Thus did his "Highness" condescend to men of low estate.

4.—He stole the hearts of the people.—"So Absalom stole the hearts of all Israel." What a thief he was! He did not steal their money, but themselves. He stole them from their allegiance to their brave and noble king. He stole their hearts from their loyalty to God's anointed. He stole the subjects of the king his father from him. He was a pretending, scheming, black-hearted traitor who deceived the people to their ruin, and grossly outraged his father's kindness, and sinned against God and the whole nation of Israel. It may be wondered how he succeeded in doing all this work of conspiracy so successfully. Where was the king, where was Ahithophel, where was the vigilant Joab, where were the old nobles and courtiers of David, where was the loyalty of the people that allowed this to go on? The king was sick and over-indulgent with Absalom, and would not believe an evil report of him; Ahithophel was already a traitor in his heart, and was playing into the hands of Absalom and hoodwinking the king; Joab was powerless to do aught against the king's commandment, and perhaps was somewhat displeased with the king himself. The nobles were disaffected with the king on some account; and the people at large had lost some of the high respect in which he had been held since his sin and public disgrace in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba. Poor king! He was being left alone without many, if any, true friends about him. God's hand was against him, and he was being prepared to drink his last bitter cup of affliction meted out to him for his own sin.

II.—THE CONSPIRACY FULLY INAUGURATED.

For years the seeds of discontent had been industriously sown, and the crafty demagogism of Absalom had secured for himself a high degree of popularity. The whole country was corrupted by his emissaries and secret workers. The time was now ripe for a final *coup*, and he was not slow to inaugurate it. It would not be safe, even now, to throw off his cloak of treachery and inaugurate his rebellion in the capital itself. He will have himself proclaimed king at a distance, gather his adherents together from afar. and march on Jerusalem and

take possession of the government before his father can put it in a defensible condition. This plan he carries out by a series of crafty acts.

1.—By an unblushing act of hypocrisy.—He goes to his father, well knowing the king's piety, and proposes to him that he may have privilege to go to Hebron, the ancient capital of Israel and the place of his birth, and there perform a vow which he had vowed to God, in gratitude for his restoration to the king's favor. Of course, this was a mere pretense. He had made no vow, but simply played the hypocrite, to deceive his father and the court at Jerusalem. How shameful it is to do wickedness in the name of God and in violation of filial piety! And yet the blackest crimes that have ever been done in this world have been done in the name of religion. Even our Lord Jesus was murdered on a hypocritical pretense of honoring God.

2.—By means of emissaries.—The people were ripe for revolt, and for Absalom to head it. He, therefore, had sent forth throughout the land secret agents, and communicated with the people that all was now ready. When the sound of the trumpet should be heard, they were to know that Absalom reigned at Hebron and rally to his standard. He counted on that strange enthusiasm which carries people before it, even against their judgment and desires.

3.—By entrapping a great company of honorable men into his schemes.—Absalom had secured from the king a company of two hundred men, presumably the king's courtiers and chief officers, who were entirely ignorant of Absalom's designs. They went with him to Hebron, and when he was suddenly proclaimed king their presence would, to all appearance, be an indorsement of it. It would be difficult for them to make it appear to the king that they had been duped and, by force of circumstances, would throw in their lot with the rebel chieftain. This is not an unusual thing to history.

4.—By the counsel of Ahithophel.—Ahithophel was already in secret league with Absalom. At the critical moment he deserted the court of David and went openly to the new court of Absalom, thus strengthening his hand with his counsel and by the influence of his presence. When all the people knew that Ahithophel had forsaken the king and gone over to Absalom's side, they would no longer hesitate. The cause of Ahithophel's disaffection was probably a secret resentment of the dishonor David had put upon Bathsheba, who was his granddaughter. Thus again was David reaping in a field from which he least expected it, another installment of the harvest he had sown. How our sins do spring up about us, to find us out and to punish us!

5.—By the flocking of the people to his standard.—"And the

conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom." Here we have another evidence of the fickleness of people as a mass. They go with the tide; they stop not to consider. Misguided by corrupt and designing leaders, they are like a flock of sheep led about hither and thither. One day they will cry out hosannas to Jesus, and the next they cry with vehemence, "Away with him! Crucify him! crucify him!" This is not only true of religious movements, but of the social and political movements of the times. Thousands are led into rebellion against lawful government by the designs of corrupt and selfish leaders; thousands have been led into social and economic movements to their own hurt, by designing and crafty demagogues, who use them but as tools for their own ends. Well has Bishop Hall remarked: "How many thousands are thus ignorantly misled into the train of error! Their simplicity is as worthy of pity as their misguidance is of indignation. Those who will suffer themselves to be misguided with semblances of truth and faithfulness, must needs be as far from safety as innocence."

Let us draw from this a lesson that shall save us, perchance, from deserting the cause of our Lord and King at the flattering behests of designing and false religious leaders, and from the influence of a multitude who make haste to do evil.

LESSON XLV.

DAVID'S GRIEF FOR ABSALOM.—II. Sam. xviii. 18-33.

GOLDEN TEXT.—A foolish son is a grief to his father, and a bitterness to her that bare him.—Prov. xvii, 25.

Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale : for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance : and he called the pillar after his own name : and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place. Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the Lord hath avenged him of his enemies. And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day : but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead. Then said Joab to Cushl, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cushl bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cushl. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready ? But howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cushl. And David sat between the two gates : and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone. And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. And the watchman saw another man running : and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings. And the watchman said, Methinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king. And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe ? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still. And, behold, Cushl came ; and Cushl said, Tidings, my lord the king : for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. And the king said unto Cushl, Is the young man Absalom safe ? And Cushl answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept : and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom ! my son, my son Absalom ! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son !—II. Sam. xviii, 18-33.

The intervening chapters give us a vivid picture of David's flight with his immediate family from Jerusalem. We at first marvel that

David should give up his kingdom and throne without a struggle to his ungrateful, wicked, and rebellious son; but when we remember that he understood all these calamities, which had and were still coming upon him as a part of the appointed punishment for his sin, we understand it the more readily. It was not so much Absalom who was driving him from Jerusalem as it was God who was chastising him. This he accepted even down to the incident of the cursing and stone-throwing of Shimei. "So let him curse," said the poor, humbled king, "because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" If this was accepted from the Lord's hand and meekly borne, we can readily understand how he would accept the greater affliction of which this was but a passing incident. Especially in the light of the words which Nathan had spoken unto him. (xii, 10-12.) Nevertheless, David took some precautions to save his own life, probably anticipating that the Lord would yet restore him to his kingdom, and not believing that the covenant which he had made with him would be confirmed in Absalom, whom though he loved with a foolish love, yet he could not honor or anticipate as a future king. When the king ordered the ark back to Jerusalem, and the priests and his two sons, it shows that he expected that the Lord would yet restore him after he had been publicly chastised in "the face of all Israel, and in the light of the sun." The story of Ahithophel's blood-thirsty counsel, and how it was frustrated by David's friend Hushai, who had returned to Jerusalem to look after the king's interest, and especially to bring to confusion the advice of Ahithophel, who went and hanged himself, both conscience-stricken and mortified at the part he had so illy as well as wickedly played, would still further encourage the hope. The faithful friends of David, who would follow him whithersoever he went, especially the devoted Ittai and other Gentile friends, remind us of the faithful Gentile Church which clave to Jesus after he was rejected and crucified by the Jews, his own kindred. Then comes the pursuit of Absalom and all Israel after their king, and the details of preparation for the decisive battle between the king's forces and those of the rebel son; David's tender and forgiving charge concerning Absalom; the battle and the singular death of Absalom, caught by his hair in the branches of an oak tree, and slain by the hand of Joab, who was a better statesman in this respect than the king, for he knew both the king and the rebel. Should Absalom be spared, there would only be another outbreak afterward, nor would Israel tolerate such misguided clemency, especially after the loss of twenty thousand of the flower of the land. This brings the events down to the text of our lesson.

I.—ABSALOM'S PILLAR AND GRAVE.

Absalom had had two sons, but they were dead, and for some reason he had despaired of other issue; so in his pride and desire to be remembered in after years, and perhaps with an eye to preferment, he had builded him a splendid monumental or memorial pillar in the king's dale, a situation in the near neighborhood of Jerusalem. We do not know any thing of the character of this structure. It was an ambitious and vain proceeding at any rate, and stands out in striking contrast with the monument that was finally reared over his grave. He had no doubt expected to be buried at last with great pomp and ceremonial, under or at the foot of the pillar he had raised. Whereas he was miserably slain while dangling in mid-air, hanging by his locks, in which he had taken such pride, and his body was flung into a pit hastily digged where he died, and a heap of stone piled over it. Thus did his pride come down with all his ambitious schemes. In this Absalom was not unlike many other men who have promised to themselves posthumous fame, only to be remembered by their sins, and have their last end and resting place marked by some sign of disgrace. If a man want a memorial pillar, let him rear it not in marble, but in deeds, and construct it out of the imperishable materials of a godly character. Absalom's splendid gifts, misdirected by reckless ambition, finally brought him to an ignominious death, and left him covered with immortal infamy.

II.—THE TIDINGS OF JOY AND GRIEF.

David had himself desired to go and lead his own army to battle, but had been dissuaded by his captains and people. Awaiting the issue of the battle at Mahanaim, he sat in the middle court all the day long. He had charged Joab and the others "to deal gently with the young man, even with Absalom." Now that the battle was over, the glorious victory won, even at the expense of twenty thousand precious lives, and Absalom was dead, the tidings must be sent back at once to the king. Three men are concerned in this duty. Joab, the captain of the host, Ahimaaz, and Cushie. The tidings to be sent to the king were both tidings of joy and sorrow. Of joy because the rebellion was defeated and the kingdom restored by that one decisive battle. Of sorrow because so many of Israel's brave soldiers were slain, and Absalom was dead. Could we always have tidings of joy to carry, it would not be difficult to arrange the details of the message or to find a fitting messenger; but when they are mixed tidings, and the

reception of them is doubtful, it is more difficult. There was this difficulty in the present case.

1.—Concerning Joab.—Joab was David's chief captain. A man of stern and relentless character, not without his splendid characteristics. He knew well the king's weakness for Absalom, and had not forgotten his last charge to him to "deal gently" with Absalom; but he also knew that the heart of the father had overridden the judgment of the king, and therefore, in the interests both of the king and the nation, had not scrupled to put Absalom to death when he saw that he was caught by the hair of his head in the tree. No doubt he was somewhat troubled in view of the effect of this latter part of the news of the day upon the king. He therefore selected for his messenger Cushi, an official runner, who would, without circumlocution or feeling, bluntly tell the story of all to the king and have it over. He would not enter into particulars nor mince matters. He was a mere dispatch, without feeling or prejudice in the matter. His tidings were to be purely official, therefore Joab refused at first the offer of David's friend, Ahimaaz, to be the bearer of the news, fearing perhaps that Ahimaaz, out of friendship and sympathy with the king, would tell the story of Absalom's death, to the prejudice of himself, and perhaps to the damage of the state.

2.—Concerning Ahimaaz.—This man was the son of Zadoc the priest, the same who had acted as runner for David during the first part of his exile, and brought him word of Absalom's plan. His desire to bear the tidings to David was perhaps dictated both by a wish to be the bearer of the glad tidings of the great victory, and at the same time do what he could to save the feelings of his royal master, because of the death of Absalom. He seems finally to have persuaded Joab of this, and got his permission to run. Being by far the fleetest runner of the two, he passed Cushi on the way, who had had considerable start of him, and reached the king first. Love is always fleet of foot than mere duty.

3.—The tidings delivered.—When the watchman on the walls saw Ahimaaz coming he reported it to the king, and also suggested who he was, because Ahimaaz was well known by his rapid and peculiar gait. The subsequent appearance of Cushi in the distance was also reported. The king rightly judged that the tidings were good which these runners brought, since they came alone and not as those who were fleeing from the battle. As soon as Ahimaaz drew near he cried out: "All is well," and fell down upon the earth upon his face before the king, and said, "Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hands against

my lord, the king." No doubt he thought that David's joy over this bit of news would be so great that it would enable him to bear the news of Absalom's death the better, which news he purposed to say nothing about. But the king's mind was more upon Absalom than upon the fate of the kingdom, so he immediately asked concerning the "young man." Ahimaaz avoided a direct answer, and indeed, prevaricated a little to spare the king. Then came Cush, and the king bade Ahimaaz stand aside till he should question the second messenger. Cush's tidings were formal, but to the same effect as those of Ahimaaz concerning the defeat of the rebels. The king immediately asked him concerning the welfare of Absalom. To this question, being merely an official messenger, he reported the death of Absalom, no doubt in the words with which Joab had filled his mouth. "The enemies of my lord, the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man." Joab no doubt meant to remind the king of the great event, and that Absalom was but a rebel, and as such should be regarded as an enemy. But Joab's message failed of its purpose. David for the time being forgot that he was a king, and that Absalom was a rebel, and remembered only that he was a father, and that Absalom was his darling and too fondly loved son.

III.—DAVID'S LAMENT OVER ABSALOM.

Nothing recorded in history or literature equals the pathetic sorrow of this celebrated lament of David over Absalom. It is not with the language of the lament that we have to do, however, but with the sorrow of the king. The news of the death of Absalom came upon David as if he had been smitten with a sudden blow. The king was much moved (that is, he was thrown into a passion of grief) and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. David was a man of many tears: his life, all along, had been full of sorrows. He wept when he parted from Jonathan; he wept when Saul and Jonathan perished; he wept over the death of the child born to him in adultery with Bathsheba; he wept over the murder of his son Amnon by Absalom; he wept when he fled from Jerusalem before Absalom; he mentions the many tears that moistened his solitary bed; he weeps now most bitterly over the death of this favorite but most ungrateful and wicked son, at whose hands he had received the last draught of the bitter cup God had prepared for him because of his sins. No doubt he expressed a true feeling and honest desire when he said: "Would God I had died for thee!" In all David's care, pity, and sorrow over Absalom, we can not but see a glimpse of what lies in the Father's heart for sinners, even

the very worst. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem and prayed, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do," when he hung on the cross and thus prayed for his murderers, so did David weep and pray over and for Absalom. The grief of David, in all the circumstances, must be regarded from two different stand-points: that of a loving father and that of a theocratic king. In the one case the sorrow was natural, and we can not but say commendable, even if it was excessive, while in the other case it was not altogether justifiable, and even had elements of selfishness and injustice in it.

1.—Wherein David's grief was commendable.—(a) *Absalom was his son.* As such, his father could not but mourn over his untimely death. It is natural for us to sorrow over the death of those who are of our own flesh and blood, however misguided and wayward they have been. Here nature simply asserts herself, and the heart gives involuntary expression to its sorrow in the face of the simple fact: "My son is dead." We do not blame David in this; indeed, we should have blamed him if he had not wept for Absalom. (b) *Absalom was a wayward and wicked son.* This fact, instead of drying his tears, caused them to flow the faster. There is grief in the thought of the loss of a child especially dear because of his faithfulness and obedience, but it is not uncommon that the bitterest sorrow is felt over the death of a poor outcast and reprobate child. In such case, pity is mingled with love, and the thought of the ruined character and the wasted and misused life, lends poignancy to one's grief. We can imagine David crying out: "O, my poor misguided boy!" I have known many a mother and father to mourn and weep over profligate children when their affection *seemed* to be cold and indifferent toward their affectionate and obedient children. In this David was but yielding to the natural course of human affection. (c) *Absalom was an ungrateful son.* In spite of all his forbearance and kindness, Absalom had systematically repaid it all by lifting up his dastard hand against his father. There is a sense of personal injury in such conduct that does not, indeed, express itself in resentment, but in a broken heart. If only Absalom had expressed regret for his past life and for his last wickedness, David could have borne it better; but he died as he had lived, without affection for his father and, in fact, his bitterest and most relentless enemy. Who can measure such a grief as this when it has come to the full? (d) *Absalom was a lost soul.* No doubt this entered into David's grief. What must be the destiny of a soul thus wicked, ungrateful, and defiant alike of the laws of nature, of man, and of God? Had he died penitent at last, reconciled to God as well as to his earthly father, there would be some mitigation in the grief. But Absalom has been sent

into eternity with all the sin and guilt of a life-time on his soul, and David must mourn him not only as a lost son, but as a lost soul. There can be no grief so keen as this to one who must contemplate it from the stand-point of natural and parental affection. I have often heard fathers and mothers wail out their grief with this as the chief note in the strain: "Oh, if only I could know that my son were safe with God, I could bear my sorrow better." David did not have this consolation. On the other hand, he had to contemplate Absalom in eternity, a soul cast into a pit deeper, darker, and more horrible than the one into which Joab had cast his body. It was not only that he died and was buried, but that in hell he was lifting up his eyes, being in torment.

(e) *He mourned because he was, in part, to blame for this awful end.* Had he been more faithful in dealing with Absalom in his youth; had he restrained his wayward disposition, corrected his conceited vanity, and checked his vaulting ambition; had he punished him for his terrible sin in murdering his brother Amnon; had he not indulged him after he received him back to court, with horses, and chariots, and runners, and a princely estate that led him on to rebellion, Absalom might have been saved and his splendid talents turned to good account. No doubt David thought of all this. "I am partly, if not chiefly, to blame for his death, in that it was through my weakness and partial love that he developed as he did." David cried out: "Would God I had died for thee!" It would have been better had he lived for him in a different way. Many a father has to thank himself for his son's ruin. We have many such fathers and many such sons in our minds.

(f) *He mourned because he saw the hand of God in it.* It was a bitter thought, that in this tragic end of a wicked life, and that of his son, he saw God's method of chastising him for his own sin. God had taken his own errors and corrected him with them. All the bitterness of this was now upon his soul. What a tide of sorrow all these streams made, and how dreadful it was to have it all pouring itself at once into and over his soul!

2.—Wherein David's grief was reprehensible.—David was both a king and a father. In the grief of the father he lost sight of his relations both to Absalom and to his people as their king. His grief was something of a wild passion of sorrow, in which he forgot every thing and everybody else except only himself and his wayward and wicked son. That his officers and people felt this keenly, and not without cause, is seen in the subsequent records. Let us glance at some of the elements of blameworthiness in this matter. (a) *It was excessive.* We are cautioned in the word of God not to "sorrow overmuch." There is a limit beyond which it is neither good, wise, nor well for us

to indulge our grief. We may carry it too far. We know very good people who have built a tabernacle around their grief, and have retired within it and shut themselves out and in from every other duty and consideration, so that they become a burden to themselves, a distress and annoyance to their friends, and recreant to all their duties. In this they are not to be praised, though they may be pitied. Sorrow is the lot of all, and we should accept it from God's hand, and exercise faith in it, and cast ourselves and our grief upon him who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. (b) *In that he lost sight of God's hand in the matter.* David was God's representative—his Messiah—in the government of Israel. Absalom was both his enemy and the enemy of God. His rebellion was a crime against the state as well as an offense against his father. God had promised to preserve the kingdom against all David's enemies; and now that God had overruled the matter to the deliverance of the king and the kingdom, it was most sinful for David to ignore this fact. When Nadab and Abihu sinned against God he smote them, nor would he suffer their parents or relatives to shed a single tear over their dishonored lives and dead bodies. (c) *In that his grief was selfish, ungrateful, and unkingly.* Selfish, in that he only considered himself in the matter. It was ungrateful in that, in the excess of his own personal sorrow, he seemed neither to think nor care that in his defense and for his sake twenty thousand of his subjects were lying dead on that awful battle-field, some of them led to their death by the sin of Absalom, and some of them having laid down their lives for him, their king. Yet there was no time or inclination on his part to thank his friends for their valor, or sympathize with the mothers and fathers in Israel, who were as desolate that day over their dead sons and brothers and fathers as was he over his dead and rebellious son. Moreover, he gave no thought of gratitude either to them or to God that in the death of Absalom his kingdom was restored, the honor of God was vindicated, and the people more than ever needed his prompt attention and kindly approval and sympathy. When a man is appointed by God to a high place of authority, honor, and responsibility and trust, his public duties must always take precedence over his private sorrows. We may learn a lesson in this respect from the manner of our Lord. There was never a man whose sorrow was like unto his, and yet he never obtruded it upon others. It was only in the last days of his life that he began to speak to his disciples of his coming sorrows or his approaching death, and even then it was more out of pity and sympathy for them than from any selfish desire to enlist their sympathies for his own trouble. Even when he approached the garden, and his human soul yearned for sym-

pathy, he took but three of his disciples with him, and then he retired from their view and bore the heat and burden alone with God. How many neglect their duties to the living by an unreasoning grief over the dead! More than one family of living children have had their lives embittered by the neglect of that love and care due to them by parents who have forgotten their obligations, while indulging a morbid and selfish grief over the dead. (d) *In that he seems not in any wise to have submitted or humbled himself before God in it.* When Bathsheba's child died, he rose up and washed his face and took food, and honored God, and hoped for the best concerning his child. In this case he left God out of it all, even as he excluded his people and his kingdom. If it is urged that in the former case he had hope of "going to it," but in this case he had no hope for the lost Absalom, it must be urged that a true-hearted disciple in this most distressing aspect of human sorrow (the death of an impenitent child), must yet submit the whole matter to God, and leave it for him to do that which is right, and believe that when all things are made known, we will not only approve, but be complacent in the outcome of God's dealings with the impenitent as with the believing. The Lord has taken as the Lord gave, and let his name be blessed forever.

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LESSON XLVI.

DAVID'S LAST WORDS.—II. Sam. xxiii, 1-7.

GOLDEN TEXT.—He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.—II. Sam. xxiii, 5.

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.—II. Sam. xxiii, 1-7.

The story of David's return to Jerusalem in peace and triumph, the way he dealt with those who had been false to him at the time of his expulsion, the knitting to him again of Judah, the subsequent short-lived rebellion of Benjamin under Sheba, the famine in the land on account of Saul's treachery to the Gibeonites, and David's expiation of it by the hanging of the seven sons of Saul, are all recorded in the intervening chapters, together with the wonderful psalm which makes up the twenty-second chapter.

The exquisitely beautiful short prophetic psalm, which is the text of our lesson, is called the last words of David. We need not understand them to be the last words ever spoken by David, but rather the last psalm he ever penned. These words are not an appendage to the psalm immediately preceding them in the twenty-second chapter, although there is an evident association of ideas in them. In that psalm there is a record of God's faithfulness to him personally; in this (our lesson) there is a far-seeing prophecy of his covenant seed promised to him by Nathan the prophet (viii) and his future glorious reign over men, and the final destruction of the wicked. These words are composed in the highest style of prophetic song, and will well repay

most thorough study. There is a striking resemblance between the introduction of this psalm and that wonderful prophecy spoken by Balaam the false prophet (Num. xxiv, 3, 4), which he must have had in his mind when he composed it. The prophecy is to the same effect as that of Balaam's, so far as it appertains to the reign of the "Ruler of men." Compare the third and fourth and sixth and seventh verses of our lesson with Num. xxiv, 17. The psalm divided itself into four parts. First, David speaks of his lowly origin and subsequent exaltation, and the present inspiration in him to speak the words of God; second, he speaks of the Ruler of men; third, he speaks of God's faithful covenant with him and his house; and fourth, he speaks of the final doom of the wicked.

I.—THE INSPIRED SEER.

It is affirmed by some modern critics that there is no evidence of inspiration in the Old Testament, and especially that the writers of the Old Testament Scriptures do not claim inspiration. Certainly this claim could not be made in the face of the "so-called" last words of David; for he began them with the most remarkable claim to his inspiration in this case. Literally translated, the opening words are: "The divine sayings of David, the son of Jesse," which, after mentioning himself, he proceeds to unfold. This formula is reiterated in this first verse.

1.—*The Lord's seer.*—David is about to utter a most momentous prophecy. He has seen a vision of such grandeur and such significance—a vision so far off and yet so true, that he is astonished that he should be the chosen seer of it. This causes him to think on himself and contrast his low estate by nature and Providence with the great things that God had done for him already, and the things in the far future which he would do, in fulfillment of his covenant, to his house. He therefore mentions several things concerning himself, and gives praise to God for them. (a) *The son of Jesse.* He remembers who he was—a poor shepherd boy, the youngest son of a poor farmer in the tribe of Judah. The true child of God need not be ashamed of the "hole of the pit from whence he is digged," nor of the rock whence he was hewn. He can well afford to look back with gratitude to such an origin from the high place of honor in which he now stands as being one of God's chosen ones. (b) *His present exalted position.* "The man who was raised on high." Surely no man was ever more exalted and honored than David had been. Though his history was a checked one, both in its outward and spiritual course, yet it culminated

in the highest honor, for God had made him the head of the Messianic household, and having purged his sins, acknowledged him as his chosen servant, a man after his own heart. Every real child of God may thus congratulate himself. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God, and be such." (c) *His Messianic character*. "The anointed of the God of Jacob." How wonderful that any man should be chosen to typify in the highest degree the divine human person who came at last to be the Messiah of the Jews and the Redeemer of men. And yet this was David's honor, for Paul says of Christ that he "was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh." (Rom. i, 2.) We also, according to our calling, if not his forerunners, are his witnesses, and the declarers of his generation. (Is. liii, 8.) (d) *His beautiful office*. "The sweet psalmist of Israel." This was no egotism, but rather, a glad recognition of the fact that God had allowed him to exercise for his glory this delightful gift. It was natural to David to write and sing sweet songs; it was David's honor that God had allowed him to consecrate this gift to his service and honor. So may we, in looking over the mercies of God, rejoice that he deigns to take such gifts as we have and use them in his service. Some to prophesy, some to preach, some to minister, and some to communicate. (Rom. xii, 6-8.)

2.—The inspiration of the Almighty.—Before recording his vision of God's rich and glorious purpose concerning the Ruler of men and the righteous destruction of the wicked, David records the source, the manner, and the nature of the inspiration by which he speaks. (a) *The source of it*. He ascribes it to God, viewed in the fullness of his triune existence. "The God of Israel." This as though he had spoken of God the Father, for in this respect he was the God of Israel. "The Rock of Israel." This is as though he had spoken of God, the Son; this is the title that everywhere in the Scripture points to Jesus the Son of God, who is "our Rock." "The Spirit of the Lord." This is as though he had spoken of the Holy Spirit, who, indeed, is the same in the Old and the New Testaments. Here is the source of his inspiration. (b) *The manner of it*. It is twofold. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me." The marginal reading in the Revised Version is "in me" instead of "by me." This intimates the fact that the Spirit first filled him with the divine thought, and accords with what Peter says of the inspiration of the Old Testament prophets. "For prophecy came not in any time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (II. Pet. i, 21.) The second fact noticed in connection with the inspiration by which he spake is that "his word was upon my tongue." Here, then, we have the two

great factors in the inspired word of God. The inward communications of the Spirit, and the outward, or spoken word of the Lord. This is true of all "Scripture given by inspiration of God." It does not alter or affect this truth, that there be some who will not recognize it or hear. The unbelief of man does not make void the truth of God. (c) *The nature of it.* This is to be learned by considering from whom the inspired word came. "The God of Israel said." Here we have the thought suggested to us of God's covenant interest in his people. It is for them, and it is for us. Then again, "The Rock of Israel spake to me." Here we have the assurance of its truth, its grace, and its steadfastness. What the Rock of Israel says will be as steadfast as the Rock of Ages, whose word it is. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word endureth forever. Let us put implicit and absolute confidence in his word, confirmed as it is by his covenant oath. What comfort, what restfulness there is in dealing with God, who cares for us and whose word is the basis of our faith.

II.—THE RULER OF MEN.

Having given us his authority for speaking, he now proceeds to unfold the vision which was set before his prophetic soul, and communicate the thought inspired in his heart, and the words that were spoken to him and placed upon his tongue. The margin in the Revised Version makes the inspired seer to say: "There shall be one that ruleth over men." Balaam prophesied of this one thus:

"I see him, but not now:
I behold him, but not nigh:
There shall come forth a star out of Jacob,
And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel."—(R. V.)

David's vision of this one is an advance on that which the false prophet saw, for he saw him thus:

"One that ruleth over men righteously,
That ruleth in the fear of God;
He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth,
A morning without clouds;
When the tender grass springeth out of the earth,
Through the clear shining after rain.—(R. V.)

Balaam's prophecy identified his vision with the house of Judah and Israel; but David identifies his vision with one that shall be over men. Let us look at some of the things affirmed of this distant but coming one.

1.—His reign shall be universal.—"One that ruleth over men." This is a prophecy of Jesus Christ in his more than Messianic reign. When he shall come and take possession of the whole earth and extend his reign over all people. A Saviour and Ruler not of the Jew only, but of the Gentile also. This vision of him corresponds with the declaration of the angel at the time of his birth: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which shall be unto all people." It was a vision of him whom Daniel afterward saw, and of whose kingdom or reign he said: "And there was given unto him dominion, and glory and a kingdom, that all nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (Dan. vii, 14.) Surely this was a vision that could in any wise apply to any ordinary descendant of David; though his house was maintained in an unbroken line through all the vicissitudes of Israel, till the captivity, after which there was a suspension of Messianic dynasty; but the scepter was restored to Jesus when he came, only to be again stricken from his hand, until the Church, which is his bride, be gathered, then he will come in his glory and take the scepter of universal rule over men forever.

2.—His reign shall be in righteousness.—The grand characteristic of the reign of this universal king is that of righteousness. "He shall rule over men righteously." He is the righteous One. It does not say that mercy and goodness, pity and grace, shall be the reigning principles of his reign, but righteousness. For righteousness is better than mercy; that is, any manifestation of mercy that is not consistent with righteousness is not worth the having. Righteousness must be the corner-stone of the kingdom of God, else it is only in a degree better than the reign of men. Even his mercy must be a manifestation of it. "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." God can make no compromise with wrong-doing. When Jesus came, he did not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill and magnify them. He is not "the end of the law for" mercy, but "for righteousness." His salvation of men is not unto mere exemption from penalties, but unto righteousness. "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." "God made him to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Therefore, when he came his first public declaration to John on the banks of the Jordan, was: "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." The very fundamental declaration of the gospel is based on the righteousness of God. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God hath set forth to be a propiti-

ation, through faith in his blood, to show his righteousness; * * * for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." (Rom. iii, 21-26.) Indeed, there is more said of the righteousness of God and of his Christ, than of any other attribute of his being, and all Scripture teaches that "righteousness is the very habitation of his throne."

3.—His reign shall be in the fear of God.—This Ruler of men, through a manifestation of God in the seed of David, shall rule not for himself, or independently, but in the fear of God. When Jesus came, he declared that he came to do not his own will, but the will of him that sent him; and in the extremity of his agony in the garden he still refers himself and all things appertaining to him to the will of God, in that matchless declaration of his "Not my will but thine be done." So that in whatever relation we stand to Jesus Christ, we must know that with him the will of God is supreme, and if we are to share with him in the blessings of righteousness, that will must be supreme in us. Therefore he taught us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

4.—The blessing of his reign.—What is more beautiful than this description? "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth." How the sunlight chases away the darkness of the night and fills the heavens with splendor and the earth with radiant life! A very "morning without clouds" will that day be when the "Sun of Righteousness riseth with healing in his wings." "When the tender grass springeth out of the earth, through the clear shining of the rain." How beautiful the earth is, when, after a rain at night, the tender grass leaps up under the clear shining of the morning sun! So shall the life, the beauty, and the growth of those be who are so happy as to be numbered among the subjects of this "Ruler of men."

III.—THE SURE COVENANT.

In the margin of the Revised Version, the fifth verse reads: "For is not my house so with God?" This seems to be the true intent of David's thought. "Is not this prophecy and vision of the glorious Ruler of men, in accordance with what God promised to me and to my house by the mouth of Nathan?" (chapter vii.) This is the completion of the revelation then given, the very glory of it translated to him in this prophetic vision. Not, indeed, fulfilled in the immediate dynasty of David, for, though Solomon was a ruler of men, he was yet a limited one, and though he was in the main a righteous ruler,

he was hardly a pious one; and though, for the most part, the house of David showed more righteous and pious kings in that than did any other dynasty in the world show before or since, yet they scarcely fulfilled this vision. It was to be reserved for "the Prince of the House of David" to fulfill this vision. David, like Balaam, saw him from far, but saw him coming in accordance with that covenant which God made with him, and which he now calls to mind and rejoices himself in. "Although he maketh it not to grow." That is, though this covenant is not seen to be fulfilled in the natural seed, yet it is a covenant ordered in all things and sure, and will have its perfect fulfillment in the person of the "Ruler of men." How many beautiful and comforting things there are in this covenant! It is an everlasting covenant; it is ordered in all things; it is sure. In the contemplation of it David is perfectly satisfied. "For it is all my salvation and all my desire." So it shall be and is with every one who has entered into this covenant of grace, for the sure mercies of David. There may be times when it seems that God "maketh it not to grow," yet the man who has the vision of faith, still says with triumph and confidence: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose." We know whom we have believed, and are persuaded that he is able to keep that which we have committed to his hands against that day. We also may say with David: "This is all our desire."

IV.—THE DOOM OF THE WICKED.

The grace and mercy of God are boundless, and he desires not the death of any man that dieth, but would rather that all should come to repentance and live. Yet, if there be those—and there will be and are—who "will not have this Ruler of men to rule over them; who will not submit to his righteous government, even though it be a reign of grace in righteousness, then they must feel the weight of his righteousness in his dealing with them for sin—sin held to and unrepented of—sin rejoiced in and practiced in defiance of him. The ungodly shall be all of them as thorns to be thrust away. They shall be utterly burned with fire in their place." It is a most solemn truth that, close beside every revelation of grace, there is also a clear and distinct revelation of the righteous purpose of God to punish and destroy the willful and incorrigible sinner. The righteous shall be as a tree planted; but the ungodly are not so; they are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Jesus to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and to declare the day of vengeance of our

God." "He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." "He will gather his wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." To some he will say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father," while to others he will say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." These are enough. Grace and mercy, based on righteousness, to them who accept the government of the blessed Ruler of men; but everlasting destruction, based on righteousness, to them who despise his mercy and trample under foot his righteousness. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

In this closing portion of our lesson we have a vivid description of the wicked and their doom. 1. They are compared to thorns that mar and spoil the fruitful field. 2. They shall be thrust away. 3. They shall be handled with a hand armed with iron. "He will judge them with a rod of iron." 4. "They shall be utterly burned with fire." Behold the goodness and severity of God, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds. To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor and immortality, eternal life: but unto them who are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory and honor and peace to every man that worketh good; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God." (Rom. i, 6-11.)

LESSON XLVII.

SOLOMON'S WISE CHOICE.—I. Kings iii, 5-15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Wisdom is better than rubies.—Prov. viii, 11.

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy word: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.—I. Kings iii, 5-15.

In the two preceding chapters we have seen the scenes and events incident to the last days of King David and the settlement of the succession of Solomon, the son of Bathsheba. Adonijah was the elder son, and, according to natural order, the heir to the throne; but it was not always so in the East, that the elder was the heir either to property or a throne. The succession to both depended on the will of the parent, and not upon the accident of priority in birth. Adonijah attempted to take the succession, but his effort was nipped in the bud. Joab and Abiathar had declared for Adonijah, but the king had promised the throne and succession to Solomon, and he called to him

Nathan the prophet, Zadoc the priest, and Benaiah the general to his bedside, and commanded them to proclaim Solomon king, and inaugurate him as such in Jerusalem, and into his son's hands he abdicated the crown. Solomon quickly took measures to confirm himself in the place of power. These measures seemed harsh, but it was a time of rebellion and disturbance, and it is more than likely that by the prompt slaying of two or three restless and turbulent spirits such as Adonijah and Joab, and the banishment of the old intriguing priest, he spared and saved hundreds and thousands of lives. Had David dealt with Absalom as promptly as Solomon did with Adonijah, he would have spared himself much sorrow and saved Israel at least twenty thousand precious lives lost in Absalom's rebellion. The last of these violent acts of Solomon, was the execution of Shimei, who had cursed David his father when he was in retreat from Jerusalem to Mahanaim, and this because he had broken his parole given to Solomon upon condition of his life being spared. A careful look at all the circumstances will, besides, reveal the fact that every one of the men whom Solomon executed richly deserved their fate for their crimes, apart from their dangerous and seditious characters. Thus did Solomon, though only a youth of twenty, show a strong hand at the very outset of his government, and give proof of his ability to reign over the people. By these means also he at the very outset secured internal peace for his country.

I.—THE INAUGURATION OF HIS REIGN.

The things recorded in the last chapter were but preliminary to Solomon's reign. He now, having cleared his country of dangerous men, lays the foundation for his family life, and prepares to inaugurate, with formal ceremony, his reign. In this period, before his inauguration or coronation festival at Gibeon, three things are noticed.

1.—**His marriage.**—Having secured peace at home by removing internal foes, he now proceeds to strengthen his position by an external alliance. He chooses the daughter of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to be his queen. A marriage like this, of a foreign wife, and she daughter of Israel's ancient foe and bondmaster, though not expressly condemned and forbidden, was yet contrary to the spirit of Israel's policy and the general teaching of God's word, and could not have been the best step Solomon could have taken. His wisdom and his piety were both at fault in this. It is presumable that Pharaoh's daughter renounced her Egyptian deities, or at least conformed to Israel's worship. He brought his Egyptian princess home to Jerusalem, and dwelt

with her in the palace of David until he had built his own most splendid residence.

2.—Solomon's piety.—"And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in all the statutes of David his father." Mention is made of the love of God for Solomon. (II. Sam. xii, 24.) Indeed, his original name signifies and signalizes this fact. Jedidiah—beloved of the Lord. It is only meet that Solomon should have returned that love. We love him because he first loved us. This was the highest encomium that could ever be spoken of him or any other man. To love God is to keep the whole law, and indeed, is the fulfillment of the law. We do not, of course, understand that his love was an absolutely perfect love, for that was never true of any man, save the Lord Jesus Christ, but that he had a pious and loyal regard for the Lord, and sought to please him in all that he did. This he testifies also by the honor he gave to his father, David; for he carefully walked in his statutes and sought to do the things which had been commanded him to the very best of his ability.

3.—A fly in the ointment.—Of Jerusalem it is said: "Only the people sacrificed in high places." This was a heathen custom, and was born of superstition, and led to great corruption among the people. It is spoken of as a blemish in the religious worship of the people, though in a measure extenuated because there was no temple built as yet in the royal city. Of Solomon it is also said, as qualifying his love for the Lord: "Only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places." That this was an evil practice there can be no doubt, and it is here mentioned as a defect. Nevertheless, he was not rebuked for it. It was one of those offenses which God winked at or passed by. It did not prevent God from loving and blessing Solomon that he was not altogether perfect. What a blessed thing it is for us that God's love does not rest upon us in proportion to our perfection! While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Nevertheless, we are not to take this as a warrant to do evil, because God yet loves us while we are sinners. The end of his love is to get out and away from our sin. Yet we can but mention the fact here, since in these two unadvised things, Solomon planted the seed which afterward came up as vile thorns, and almost choked the life out of him. It is true that there was no prohibition against marrying the daughter of the King of Egypt, but only of those daughters of the immediately surrounding nations; but having begun by marrying one daughter of a foreign king, he ended by loving and marrying many strange women—that is, foreign women. These afterward corrupted Solomon and introduced their heathen abominations into Jerusalem. The worship on high places degenerated at last

into the worship of idols in the high places. We can not be too careful of admitting into our lives even the least things that are contrary to the spirit of God's word, even though God does not at the time expressly forbid them. A real Christian can better afford to forego some things that might be tolerated according to strict construction of the letter of the law than to involve himself in a course of procedure which may end in utter violation of both letter and spirit, as in Solomon's case. (xi, 9.)

II.—SOLOMON'S DREAM.

Solomon proceeded with his court to Gibeon, one of the most famous of the high places, about six miles from Jerusalem, and there inaugurated a solemn coronation feast, at which during several days, perhaps including two Sabbaths, he offered a thousand burnt offerings. We may well believe that this was not in mere ostentation, but dictated by profound reverence, and a desire to put God and his worship and fear in the very forefront of his reign. During one of the nights, while Solomon was asleep, "The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream, and said, 'What shall I give thee?' This was one of the ways in the olden time, before revelation was complete, in which it pleased the Lord to appear to his people and communicate with them concerning his will. It is not necessary to suppose that Solomon either saw a vision or heard a voice saying these words to him. It may have been, and perhaps was, simply a dream such as we often have in which persons and things and conversations seem to appear and take place in so vivid and actual a manner that, while they last, they have all the force of reality. In such a dream the Lord appeared to Solomon. The dream in which the Lord appeared was God's answer to Solomon's sacrifice, which had for its purpose the testimony of his complete consecration to God, and his dependence upon him in the matter of the government of Israel. God had so appeared to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Joseph. The communication was entirely intelligent to his consciousness, and we know that it was not a mere idle fancy, for Solomon took it as it was meant to be—a real revelation of God to him, and a communication of his grace and will, for he immediately went to Jerusalem and stood before the ark and offered up special sacrifices, and made a feast for all his servants. God answered Solomon's burnt offering in Gibeon with a dream and a gift of wisdom, and Solomon accepted the gift, and signified the same by offering again to the Lord.

Speaking further on this point, we suppose Solomon went to sleep deeply pondering the grave responsibilities that were now coming upon

him, and earnestly desiring in his heart that the Lord would grant him the wisdom needed for his guidance. His dream took the form of his last waking thoughts, or was suggested by them, and the Lord took occasion of the dream to communicate his gracious will to his servant. We may be sure that the Lord will in some way meet and answer every sincere desire of those of his servants who sincerely desire to do his will. All prayer is answered in the affirmative when it is made for the glory of God, and not to be consumed on the altar of our own lusts as too many of our prayers are. In such cases we need not expect that the Lord will come to us bearing the answer to our prayers, or with such a free and open challenge to ask what we will, as in this case. When our Lord told his disciples to ask what they would and it should be given them, the presumption was that they would ask only those things which would be for his glory and in accordance with his name.

III.—THE ROYAL PETITIONER.

There is a popular feeling that it is the proper thing for ordinary mortals to fall low before God, but when one of the great ones of the earth takes his place at the feet of the Lord, we think it a great thing, indeed. But with God all men are equal. A king is no more in his sight than a beggar, except that from those to whom he has given great position and great power, he expects a corresponding spirit of humility and dependence. And yet it is a worthy sight to see one who, by nature or the accident of birth, or by mighty achievements, has attained highest rank in this world, recognizing his dependence and coming meekly and humbly to the feet of the Giver of all good, and the Ruler of men, even as the humblest of earth, and there preferring his request and making his glad submission. Solomon, in all his glory, was never a greater man than when he was thus humbly submitting himself to God and speaking as a little child to him. There are several characteristics of this wonderful prayer of Solomon that are worthy of our closest study.

1.—**His gratitude.**—This is seen in his review of the mercies which God had shown to his father David. He did not forget that what he now had of position and honor and power had come to him through his father, and that what his father had bestowed upon him, had, in its turn, come to him through the covenant of grace and tender mercy voluntarily made by the Lord. Moreover, he disclaimed any personal merit, or cause in himself, why he should now be king over all Israel. It was more out of kindness to David than on account of any thing in himself that he was king. “Thou hast kept for him (David)

this great kindness, that thou hast given to him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day." Solomon's present power was a gift to David his father in accordance with the covenant of God. Two things we can not be too thankful for,—covenant mercies and godly parents through whom they descend to us. There is no greater inheritance in this earth than that which is bequeathed to us in the heritage of birth from parents who have been the friends and servants of God. It is true that grace is not inherited from our parents, but a thousand advantages do come to the children of pious parents that do not to those who are born of ungodly parents and reared in ungodly homes. When we come before God to make request it is a supreme privilege to mention before him the merits and righteousness of another, especially another who is in covenant relation with God. Solomon could speak of the uprightness and righteousness of his father, and the covenant which God had made with him; but we have even a greater privilege. We may speak of the greater merit and more perfect righteousness of and the better covenant made with David's great Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Every prayer answered in his name, redounds to his glory. However unworthy and sinful we may be, the humble and believing mention of Jesus' name buries our demerits in the grave of him who died, and brings before the Lord the all-prevailing righteousness of him who rose from the dead for our justification. We hide ourselves in him, and God deals with us for his sake.

2.—His solemnity.—Solomon did not enter upon his kingly office lightly or flippantly, much less proudly. He recognized the solemn responsibility of being king over God's great people. We may not be called upon to rule over a nation, but any work which is given us to do for the Lord requires in us and calls for a sense of responsibility. Nothing which the Lord has for us to do may be undertaken without wisdom and strength given us from above. We are apt to think that only great concerns need divine help, but nothing could be farther from the truth than this. To rule an empire or sweep a crossing, is of equal dignity and importance if they both come from the Lord for us to do. To preach a sermon; to make a pastoral call; to teach a Sabbath-school class; to visit the sick; to give a cup of water to a disciple in the name of Christ; to do any small act of kindness to the poorest and meanest beggar on the earth; to attend to household duties or to the ordinary business of life, whether as employer or employé; and to do these things well and righteously, must be alike done in the fear of the Lord. Shall we ever truly learn this lesson: "Without me ye can do nothing"? This is what Solomon realized on this occasion. Yet the smallest and most obscure of God's servants have work to do

for his kingdom as truly as did Solomon, and it ought to be done in the same spirit of solemn recognition of God and dependence on his wisdom and favor as that which moved Israel's glorious king. When we come to recognize this truth there will not be so many failures in our work, but more manifestations of the Lord's presence and power among us.

3.—His humility.—Solomon did not speak of himself as being a king as an argument why the Lord should hear his prayer, but only as the measure of the work to be done by him. He spoke of himself as a child, with neither wisdom nor strength with which to discharge his mighty responsibility. "Lord, thou hast put a king's work upon a child's shoulders. Thou requirest wisdom and righteousness of one who is but a child; therefore, Lord, thou must be strength and wisdom for me." He is only truly great who takes this position before God. The spirit of a little child is the spirit of the Christian.

4.—His wisdom.—This is seen in his wise choice. He was, undoubtedly, a man of great natural ability—of unusual endowments of mind. This is nowhere more apparent than in this, that he thought himself not to have wisdom. He was wise enough to know that mere human wisdom was not wise enough to do God's work with. He that esteemeth himself to be wise becomes a fool, and turns out usually to be a mere bundle of vain conceit. A wise man knows his deficiencies. Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of light, who giveth wisdom to every one who asketh it, and upbraideth not. Not that there are any who have no wisdom, but that all do not know how much they need more than they have, and wisdom of a higher order and kind. If any man is wise enough to know how much he lacks wisdom, let *him* ask of God, and he will get that which he lacks and needs.

5.—His unselfishness.—In his petition Samuel passed by all request for riches, and personal power, and greatness—all outward gifts, which might be seen of men and attributed to his own personal greatness. His prayer was for an inward and unseen gift, and that only that he might be just and useful to others. His thought was for the people over whom he had been made king, and for the glory and honor of God, whose servant he was, in the government of his people. This is one of the essential conditions of answered prayer. If all our prayers were analyzed, I fear it would be seen that most of them would reveal gross selfishness. They are for our comfort, our power, our pride, our ambition. These motives come in even when we venture and dare to say, "and this we ask for thy glory." But Solomon prayed: "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad."

IV.—THE WISE PRAYER ANSWERED.

Doubtless the Lord knew what was in the heart of Solomon before he challenged him to ask what he would, and he had the answer all ready for him. It is the part of divine wisdom, however, to bestow his gifts in answer to prayer. He will have us come to him for the things that he knoweth we have need of. This is to encourage confidence and a spirit of dependence.

1.—The speech pleased the Lord.—How blessed the man whose life, and prayers, and speech please the Lord! He is well pleased to see his own character reflected in his children and servants; to behold the face and spirit of wisdom, and humility, and grace turned up to him in petition.

2.—His prayer was instantly answered.—Not that all wisdom was instantly poured into the heart of Solomon, but that his petition was heard and assented to. Thereafter, as Solomon had occasion to exercise wisdom, it was given to him as he had need. When the Lord answers prayer, it does not follow that we are always conscious of the answer or are immediately put in full possession of the gift, but we may count on the possession of the blessing as we need it. As thy day, so shall thy strength be. In the incident that occurred immediately afterward, God gave Solomon a pledge of his faithfulness in this respect.

3.—His prayer more than answered.—Solomon did not ask for riches, nor long life, nor power over his enemies, but for a higher gift, and that for the benefit of others and the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, it pleased the Lord to give him, beside, what he might have asked for but did not. This is in illustration of our Lord's promise: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Unselfishness is sure to be rewarded, while selfishness is sure, in the long run, to suffer defeat at its own hands. "He that loses his life shall find it, and he that saves his life shall lose it."

4.—A wise caution.—The lesson ends with a wise caution and promise that the future would be dependent upon his faithfulness. If we rightly esteem and use God's gifts, they will be increased; but if we abuse them or are unfaithful to them, they will be taken from us. So long as Solomon was faithful he was great. His downfall began when he forgot the Lord and turned to selfishness and sin.

LESSON XLVIII.

THE TEMPLE DEDICATED.—I. Kings viii, 54-63.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.—Hab. ii, 20.

And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us; that he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers. And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day. And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord.—I. Kings viii, 54-63.

Our lesson is entitled "The dedication of the Temple;" but it really deals with the benediction which Solomon pronounced upon the people after his prayer, and has really to do with the dedication of the people to the Lord, for whose sake and instruction the Temple was built and dedicated. We ought to remember that the Temple is but a great double type, first of our Lord Jesus in whom Jehovah came and tabernacled in the flesh in order that we might draw near to him, even as he had by the incarnation drawn nigh to us; and second, that we ourselves are a temple unto the Lord, an habitation for him to dwell in by his Spirit; this is true of us individually, and then it is true of us collectively. So of Jesus: John i, 14; ii, 19-21; of the individual believer, I. Cor. iii, 16, 17; vi, 19; of the entire body of believers, Eph. ii, 19-22; I. Pet. ii, 4, 5. The dedication of this Temple of Solomon together with his remarkable prayer, the coming of the glory of the

Lord to it, and the great feast at the close, taken altogether was the most remarkable event in connection with Israel's history. The concluding verses of the chapter which forms the subject matter of our lesson suggests the following general lesson to us: Prayer, praise, instruction in righteousness, and holy sacrifice offered up to God.

I.—PRAYER.

Our lesson does not include a consideration of Solomon's prayer, but it tells us something of great importance in connection with it. We are introduced to this great king as he rises from his knees in front of the Ark of the Covenant to bless the people. We learn from this brief and simple statement two things in connection with prayer.

1.—**The place of prayer.**—Solomon made his prayer before the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was the heart of the Temple. It was in order that this sacred chest might have a house that the Temple was built. It was around this Ark that all the worship of Israel circulated. It was indeed more central to Israel as a nation than the throne itself. Indeed, it was in connection with this Ark that God manifested himself to and dwelt with Israel. In itself it was not a very imposing structure. A simple box or chest made of wood, two and one half cubits long, and one and a half cubits broad and high. It contained within it the two tablets on which Moses wrote the law, or rather, on which God wrote the law which he delivered to Moses. In it also was placed, afterward, the pot containing the manna which was preserved to remind them of how God had fed them in the wilderness, and the priestly rod of Aaron, which budded. It was covered with a lid, which in turn was overlaid with a heavy plate of gold, springing out of either end of which and made of the same precious material, were the two cherubim, for a description of which, see Ex. xxv. This covering of gold was the mercy-seat, or the throne of grace, from which God dispensed his gracious mercy. It was the beautiful type of our Lord Jesus Christ in relation to his mediatorial work and intercessory love for us. Hence Jesus is called our propitiatory or mercy-seat. (Rom. iii, 25; I. John ii, 2; together with Heb. iv, 16, where we are exhorted to come boldly before him to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.) This, then, is the place of prayer. Jesus Christ the righteous and merciful One is he through whom we have access to God, for in him God has been pleased to reveal himself full of grace and truth. Prayer before the Ark or in the name of Jesus suggests to us several things. *First*, that God's covenant promises and abundant mercy are founded on his essential righteousness, as the mercy-seat was

placed over the law. *Second*, that God's mercy comes between man and the broken law. *Third*, the Ark declared that an atonement made the mercy of God possible to us sinners, and opens up a way of approach to him. *Fourth*, the Ark encourages men to pray, even to come boldly into the presence of God to obtain both mercy and help. The publican who smote himself on the breast and cried out for mercy, was thus approaching God in view of the mercy-seat. The Ark, therefore, is for the benefit both of saints and sinners. For all who come to God are alike in need of his mercy, and all alike are received and accepted who draw near to him before the Ark or mercy-seat.

2.—The posture and gesture of prayer.—This is the first mention in the Scripture of any one kneeling in prayer. The ordinary posture of prayer among the Jews was standing. (Luke xviii, 11–13). Posture is not essential to prayer, for one may pray kneeling, standing, sitting, or walking, for that matter; but Solomon's posture represents the deep humility of his mind at this time, and with us there are times when no other posture than that of kneeling can fully express our spiritual attitude toward God. Solomon prayed with his hands outstretched to God—"spread up toward heaven"—as if in appeal, and in expectation of receiving the thing he sought of the Lord. When we pray, therefore, let us approach God through Jesus Christ, let us do it in humble confession of our own unworthiness, and in appeal and expectation.

II.—PRAISE.

Having concluded his prayer, Solomon arose from his knees and turned toward the people who were surrounding the Temple and filling the outer courts of it, and blessed the people of Israel with a loud voice. We do not gather from this that the king was usurping priestly functions, but simply that he spoke words of praise to God in their hearing, and continued to express toward God his eager desire for the continuance of his favor upon them. His praise of God was a blending of thanksgiving and prayer. This is as it should be. Paul, in Phil. iv, 6, bids us, "In every thing, by prayer and supplications, with thanksgiving, make our requests known unto God." Thus was Solomon both giving thanks and making his further requests known to God.

1.—His thanksgiving.—Solomon blessed the Lord for two things. *First, for rest.* "Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel." Israel's life for more than five hundred years had been largely one of unrest, storm and battle, captivity and rescue. Under Joshua, indeed, there was a partial rest conquered for them, to the

extent of establishing them in the land which the Lord God had given them (xxi, 45); but the enemies or natives of the land had not been entirely driven out; nor were they subdued under the judges, nor under Saul, nor entirely under David. Not until Solomon came to the throne were the enemies both within and around them brought entirely under subjection. (I. Kings ix, 16.) But now the rest had come. The building of the Temple and the placing of the Ark within it, and the glory of the Lord filling the Temple is a pledge of their permanent settlement in the land. Yet is there a higher and better rest contrasted with this temporal rest which Solomon celebrates. The Jews will be scattered again, their Temple destroyed, and their Ark lost, but the true Temple will come (Jesus), and in him permanent rest will be had, not from carnal enemies, but from the spiritual enemies within us and without. So the Apostle alludes to this matter. "For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth, therefore, a rest unto the people of God." Therefore, "we which have believed do enter into rest." (Heb. iv.)

Second, for keeping his promises. "There hath not failed one word of all his good promises, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant." This promise which he alludes to is found in Deut. xii, 9-12. Joshua first alluded to the fulfillment of these promises (xxi, 45), which, together with all the chapters in which they are spoken of, form the source from which Solomon drew his prayers. In this we may learn not only how truly God fulfills all his word to us, but that the secret of real prayer and praise is to plead and make mention of God's word to him. There is nothing which honors God more than to plead his word and make mention of his promises; for he hath magnified his word above all his name, and has forever established it in the heavens. We also learn that God's promises are often fulfilled to us in installments. Joshua saw the first installment fulfilled when he had partially subdued the land, enough to gain the mastery of it; Solomon saw a further and completer fulfillment when he finally expelled and utterly subdued the Philistines; it was further and in a higher way fulfilled when Jesus overthrew Satan by his death upon the cross and his triumphant resurrection from the dead; it will be finally and completely fulfilled when we have all been gathered together in the kingdom of Christ and of the Father. Let us not be discouraged when we pray, if we do not see at once the complete and fullest answer to our prayers. God is not faithless, but wise in answering our prayers, even when we plead his promises; sooner or later all will be fulfilled, even to the last letter of the promise.

2.—His request.—Insensibly and beautifully Solomon's notes of

blessing or thanksgiving glide off again into prayer, in which we note several things. *First*, he prays that God would be with him and the people as he had been with the fathers; and that "he would not leave them nor forsake them." It is a comfort for us to look back over the history of God's past faithfulness to his people, and from thence draw an argument for his future dealings with us. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." This is an Ebenezer of hope and comfort to us. It was not on account of their faithfulness, but on account of his covenant mercy and grace, that in all the past centuries God had not forsaken the fathers; so whatever misgivings we may have of our own uprightness, we may argue from his grace and plead for a continuance of it to us. We have centuries more of history of God's faithfulness than Solomon had to look back upon, and from whence to draw comfort. *Second*, that he "may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways." We do not claim God's promises absolutely, but qualify our prayer for blessing by prayer that we may be inclined in our affections to God, and that our conduct may become both our prayers and God's promises. There are those nowadays who are telling us that God does not want worship but righteousness in walk, and there be those who tell us that the main thing is to maintain a spiritual frame of mind; but this wise king shows us that God will have us give him our hearts in sincerest affection and worship, and that to evidence this we must walk in all his ways. Indeed we can not walk in his ways unless our hearts are inclined to him. These two things go together, and may not be separated. To attempt to walk in God's ways without, is to be a mere formalist; while to worship God, or attempt to without walking in his ways and keeping his commandments, is to become an empty pietist, which is nothing better than a hypocrite. "Let every one that nameth the name of Jesus Christ depart from all iniquity." And again: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." *Third*, he prays that the words of his petition be kept closely in God's remembrance, day and night, to maintain the cause of his people at all times, "as the matter shall require." This is a beautiful thought. We need not be constantly reminding God of our desire. We may trust him to remember what we have asked him, especially if it be according to his promise, even day and night, and to undertake to do for us according to our desire and his promise, according as his wisdom sees the best way to do it. By prayer we cast ourselves on God's faithfulness, his constant regard for us, and his higher wisdom in the way of performing his promise. What rest there is in this.

3.—The motive of his prayer.—It is beautiful to notice the utter

unselfishness and far-reaching motive of Solomon's prayer and praise. Not only for his sake and that of his people does he pray; but that in faithfully fulfilling his covenant promises with them, they may be witnesses to all the people of the earth of God's faithfulness, and by being kept and blessed according to all his promises, they may in time be missionaries of the grace of God to the uttermost parts of the earth, and so fulfill his promise to Abraham, that in his seed all the nations of the earth may be blessed. In the far-reaching prophesies of the Old Testament, we are told that this prayer of Solomon's will yet be fulfilled, and when our Lord comes again and his ancient but now scattered people are converted, they will indeed be the great evangelists of the world, and will carry the gospel of the kingdom and preach it as a testimony, to all the living nations of men. (Matt. xxiv, 14; Rom. x, 18, together with xi.) It should be our desire that in being blessed ourselves, we may be the means of being a blessing to others, and especially that all the people may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else.

III.—INSTRUCTION.

In view of this prayer, which so filled the heart of the king, he now turns to the people and gives them solemn exhortation and instruction.

1.—“**Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God.**”—If these blessings are to be fulfilled, it will require that the heart of the people be perfect. That is, that they be “true-hearted” and loyal in all their purposes to God. Paul makes a similar request and gives similar instruction. “Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” (Phil. iii, 15.) And so is that beautiful benediction to the Hebrew Christians. “The God of peace make you perfect unto every good work, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight.” (Heb. xiii, 20, 21.) This is simply an exhortation that, as they had that day assembled to dedicate and consecrate the Temple to God for his worship and service, so now let there be a higher act of consecration on their part by dedicating themselves to God, with whole-hearted sincerity. He is about to exhort them to walk in all his commandments, but he well knew that any such instruction would be in vain unless the hearts of the people were “perfect with the Lord.” The old ceremonial law was not so hollow and formal as many would believe. The heart was touched at every point when that ancient worship was sincerely offered to God. “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” was the prayer of David, “and renew a right spirit

within me." It was ever in vain that the people drew near with their lips if their hearts were far from him. There is as much need that we conduct the simpler worship of God under the Gospel with heart-sincerity as there was for the Jews to do so, perhaps more.

2.—To walk in his statutes.—There is a very vital connection between the practical walk of the believer and his spiritual exercises. Of what avail that we worship God with a pretense of spirituality, if our outward walk does not correspond to our spiritual pretense? How much avail that we go to church and prayer-meeting, if we are not righteous and holy in our business transactions? What avail is there that we have family prayers if we do not manifest the fruit of the spirit in our home-life? All true heart-worship reacts on the life; and, on the other hand, all holy walk reacts on the inner life of man. We can not pray or plead the promises with any confidence if we do not live and walk in practical holiness. On the other hand, if we "keep his commandments," we have great confidence in prayer. "If we can not look without fear and shame in the face of our fellow-man, how can we look with confidence into the face of God?" If we love not our brother, whom we have seen, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? A morally reckless man can not be a prayerfully confident one.

IV.—THE PEACE-OFFERINGS.

The ceremonial of dedication was followed by a magnificent feast or festival, lasting for fourteen days, in which thousands and thousands of sacrifices were offered. If the figures here seem almost incredibly large, let us remember two things. First, that there were thousands and thousands of people gathered from all Israel in Jerusalem on that occasion. "A great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt." (vs. 65.) Second, that these sacrifices were mostly, if not all, peace-offerings. That is, the blood was poured out before the altar, and a little of the fat burnt, but the rest of the sacrifice, having been given to the Lord, was returned to the people and made up the matter of their feast of fourteen days. These peace-offerings teach us two things.

1.—A giving to the Lord.—They were first given to the Lord. This is the essential thing in all our acts of worship. We give to the Lord. We are his, and all that we are and have belongs to him. No true worshiper will grudge aught that he has to him who loved us and washed us in his own blood, having given himself to us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify us to himself, a peculiar people, even a people for a possession.

2.—A receiving from the Lord.—What we give to the Lord always comes back to us fourfold. The Lord does not wish to impoverish us when he asks any thing at our hands. We can not make him rich by what we give, but he can enrich us through our gifts. The peace-offerings must have made a more blessed feast after they had come back to the people who had offered them to God. The idea that sacrifice is a loss, is not a Scriptural one. In all sacrifice we gain rather than lose. When we offer up by faith, the great sacrifice of Christ, we gain. We lose our sins, but gain forgiveness and eternal life, even as the disciples gained far more in the risen Christ than they lost in the crucified one. God always thus returns to us more and better than we give.

Let us, then, make a feast to the Lord by giving him ourselves and all that we have; then will the Lord himself come to our feast and share with us all that he is and has.

LESSON XLIX.

SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.—I. Kings x. 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—She came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.—Matt. xii, 42.

And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord; there was no more spirit in her. And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice. And she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones. And the king made of the almug-trees pillars for the house of the Lord, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day. And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.—I. Kings x, 1-13.

The story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon is one of the most familiar in the Bible. The significance of it is enhanced by the fact that our Lord himself has mentioned it in his discourse with the Jews, and commented on it as an event showing the wisdom of this Gentile woman in contrast with the unwisdom of the people of God to whom he, the greater than Solomon, had come. The story is not only authentic, but full of profound instruction to us. It has a historical significance, as evidencing the greatness and glory of Solo-

mon and the kingdom of Israel, over which God had placed him. It has a typical significance in its bearing upon our Lord's mission to the world, bringing to it and to us the wisdom of God for our salvation. (Matt. xii, 42; Luke xi, 31.) It has a prophetic significance, as showing how, in the time to come, when Jesus, the greater than Solomon, is seated on the throne of his glory, both the people and the riches of the Gentiles will come to him and worship at his feet. (Psalms lxxii, 10, 11; Isaiah lx, 6.) Solomon, in his prayer, had prophesied that the strangers from a far country should hear of God's great name, and would come and worship him; and in his benediction after the dedication of the Temple had urged upon the people, as a motive for perfection of heart and righteousness of living in connection with God's faithfulness, "that all the people of the earth might know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else." (viii, 41, 42; 59-61.) This prophecy has begun to be fulfilled—sooner, perhaps, than Solomon had expected; and this great queen, from so great a distance, was the advance guard of the mighty hosts that will come to Jesus when he is seated on the throne of his glory. How it chanced that the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, of his wisdom and his glory, we are informed in the last verses of the chapter immediately preceding. Solomon fitted out a fleet of ships and sent them into every part of the world, to secure and bring to him gold and the riches of other countries; thus his fame was spread abroad by his servants. How delightful it would be if all our merchant marine were manned by Christian sailors and commanded by Christian captains, who, while they traded for the world's wealth, should, at the same time, be heralds of the Lord's glory! Alas! that the very opposite of this is largely the case now. Our foreign commercial travelers are, for the most part, bringing dishonor and reproach upon the worthy name of Christ by their wickedness, their unrighteousness, and by carrying deadly drink among the lowest and most degraded, and thus sinking them down into the pit rather than elevating them to heaven. Our lesson divides itself into two parts: a Royal Inquirer and a Royal Convert.

I.—A ROYAL INQUIRER.

It is generally supposed that this distinguished queen, whose name we do not know, was the reigning sovereign of that country known to us as Arabia Felix. It is sometimes called Araby the Blessed, because of its enormous wealth, all of which corresponds with the details of this story. It is not of special importance that we should settle the precise location of her kingdom or that we should know her name,

though both have been the subject of not a little learned speculation. The matter of importance is that she was a great and wealthy queen from the south, who, urged by a longing desire to see and prove the wisdom of Solomon, had taken a great journey, in order that she might for herself know the truth of what she had heard, and get the benefit to be derived by a personal interview with the wise king and secure his friendship. In this respect she is a fitting type of those who hear of Jesus and seek after him and find him, to the joy and rejoicing of their hearts.

1.—Who she was.—It is true that she was a great and rich queen; but to us it is more to the point that she was a woman, a human being burdened with many perplexing and troublesome questions, and in need of a wisdom greater than her own to solve them. It is not only the poor and the obscure sinners who need to come to the “greater than Solomon” for divine wisdom. With God there is no respect of persons. The woman of Samaria was a sinner and needed Christ; but so also did Nicodemus, the great and learned and religious ruler of the Jews. The sinful woman that washed our Lord’s feet with her tears was a “debtor,” but so was the great Pharisee Simon, at whose table the Lord sat. The publican Zaccheus needed salvation; but so did the honorable counselor, Joseph of Arimathea. The Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to seek after wisdom at the lips of Solomon; but Jesus had bidden that his Gospel be preached to the ends of the earth, that all of every class and degree may hear the glad tidings of his salvation. The lesson is that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and therefore all need to come to Christ for salvation. The blessing is that he is as ready to receive the poorest as the greatest, and the greatest as well as the poorest; for he does not take account of the outward condition or circumstances of sinners, but of sinners altogether apart from their earthly state.

2.—How she was awakened.—“She heard of the fame of Solomon, concerning the name of the Lord.” We have already noted how she came to hear of him, *i. e.*, by the reports spread abroad concerning him by his servants who had gone out to the uttermost coasts. Yet it was not only of his great glory and singular wisdom, but that this all was in connection with the name of the Lord. That is, she heard that Solomon’s wisdom and glory were a gift from the Lord, and therefore what wisdom he had and what riches to impart were from the Lord, and not from himself alone. It was this that awakened in her a conviction and desire to see him and submit her questions. It is so with Jesus. The words which he speaks—and never man spake as he spake—

were not his own words, in the sense that they were mere words of human wisdom, but he "spake the words of him that sent him." The wisdom of Jesus was from above. The knowledge that comes to men through the preaching of the Gospel, that God has laid up in him who is greater than Solomon all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, awakens in them a desire to know the things which man's wisdom is not sufficient for. The sense of need in us and the knowledge of wisdom and grace to meet that need in Jesus Christ sends us to him. This is the history of all those awakenings which bring men and women to Christ. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

3.—She longed to know the truth.—It was no mere idle curiosity which moved the Queen of Sheba to seek out Solomon, and know for herself the truth. "She came to prove him with hard questions," not to cavil as did the lawyers and the scribes, to entangle him in his talk, but to submit to his wisdom certain questions for which as yet she had found no solution. Every thing in connection with her visit goes to show that she was in deepest earnest, and possessed with a purpose entirely outside the mere realm of curiosity. The whole world, irrespective of country or nation, has ever been burdened with mighty questions which press upon the soul for an answer, and has never yet found a teacher who was able to answer them; not questions concerning this life only, but especially concerning the life to come. "Who is God?" "May we know him?" "Who am I?" "Whence came I, and whither am I going?" "What is sin, and why does it so oppress the soul and burden the conscience; and how may we be rid of it?" "If a man die shall he live again; and if so, how may he attain unto life?" These and a thousand other questions awaken in every honest and thoughtful soul; and when there is a prospect of getting them answered, the inquirer is ready to go any length to have them answered. So came the Greeks, who said to the disciples: "Sirs, we would see Jesus." (John xii.)

4.—She came.—She was not contented to hear about Solomon, but would come to him and know for herself if these things were so which she had heard. This is the sign of a real inquirer. There are many persons who profess to desire to know the truth, and will discourse and discuss their questions by the hour with the king's servants, but who will not go directly to the king to find out for themselves. Not so was the Queen of Sheba. Not so was Nathanael, though there were reasons, and weighty ones, in his mind why he doubted if Jesus was the Christ, yet, like the queen of the South, he laid aside all his prejudices and doubts, and came to Jesus to see and know for himself. "Come

and see," is the wisest answer that any servant can give to any one who really desires heavenly wisdom. There are many admirable circumstances related of this woman's coming. 1. She came a long distance. Her kingdom was not less than fifteen hundred miles away from Solomon; and when we remember that at the most she could not travel in those days more than about twenty miles a day, and that thus it would require about six months to go and return, we readily see how much in earnest she was. 2. Her coming was at great inconvenience. By the hardship of such a journey for a woman accustomed to luxury and ease, we are further impressed with the greatness of her desire. 3. The journey was made at great cost, and perhaps at no little peril, for traveling in those days was by no means devoid of danger. 4. She came prepared to believe all that she had heard, and so make her offering. Like the wise men, she brought with her gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh, ready to lay them at Solomon's feet if the reports she heard should prove true. What a contrast between the earnestness of this woman to get wisdom from Solomon, and the indifference of people now to receive the true wisdom, that which is able to make us wise unto salvation from the greater than Solomon. She had to come from afar to Solomon; but Jesus has come afar in order to bring wisdom to us. She counted no cost of time, money, inconvenience, or danger too great to get her questions answered; but many now are not willing even to listen to the wisdom of Jesus, nor to make the least sacrifice of time or convenience to hear the things which will give them life. Wisdom has come to their doors, yet will they not rise to let him in; riches are laid at their feet, yet will they not stoop to pick them up; life is freely offered to them, yet they prefer death.

II.—A ROYAL CONVERT.

Having sought Solomon with an earnest and honest desire to see his glory and prove his wisdom, she was ready to believe what she saw and accept the wisdom she was in search of. It is not a wonder, therefore, with such sincerity in her heart, she at once accepted the testimony, and yielded herself a willing and glad friend to the wise king. It is always so with honest and sincere inquirers. If there be first a ready and honest heart, there is never any doubt about the wisdom and glory of Christ being revealed and accepted. It is because so many inquirers are not like Nathanael (that is, without guile), that they do not see the glory of Christ and yield to his wisdom.

1.—**She heard his wisdom.**—Coming into his presence, she sub-

mitted her questions to Solomon, and he told her all her questions; "there was not any thing hid from the king which he told her not." Thus she had for herself a knowledge of the wisdom she sought, and of which she had heard. There are always two hearings of the Gospel: one which brings it to our attention, and one which brings it to our hearts. There is no question which haunts or harrows our souls but that we get an answer from Jesus Christ. He is, in fact, the answer to all our inquiries. Nothing in our hearts is hid from him; that is, that he can not see and give us the answer for. As of old he used to heal all who came unto him, so now he answers every question which we submit to him. If we doubt in the least the truth of his answers, we have only to begin to act on his instructions, and we shall "know of the doctrine that it is true." (John vii, 17.) What a blessed thing it is that we may come to the very fountain-head of wisdom and knowledge, and be sure that there is nothing in our need of spirit, soul, or body, that he can not and will not supply!

2.—She saw.—Not only did she hear the answer for herself to her questions, but she saw his glory. Jesus has a glory to reveal to those who seek after him which the unbelieving world can not see. "We behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." What did the Queen of Sheba see that so impressed her? She "saw his wisdom and the house he had built." That is, in his wisdom she beheld his glory, and in his house she saw all the appointments which manifested the wisdom that was in him. So is it in Jesus Christ. His doctrine reveals his wisdom, and his person, as the incarnate God, corresponding to the house which the Lord built for Solomon, gave evidence that he was not of man, but of God, even as Solomon's glorious surroundings were not of man, though by man, but of God. She saw the meat of his table. That is, the admirable and abundant provisions of his table; such as she had never witnessed before. What a bill of fare do those see on the table of the Lord which he spreads for his servants and friends! Forgiveness, Justification, Eternal Life, Peace, Joy in the Holy Ghost, Contentment, Strength, the Comfort of the Holy Ghost, and a thousand nameless blessings and delicacies of grace which are loaded on his banqueting board, over which waves at all times the banner of his love. "The attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cup-bearers; and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord." That is, she saw the apartments of his ministers and servants, and their gorgeous clothing, and the noble stairway from his private dwelling to the Temple. And what do we see at the court of our glorious King? We see how wonderfully he has provided for us, how gloriously he has

appareled us, and how beautifully he has brought our private life into close connection and fellowship with the religious life. Indeed, how he has joined his and our house to the house of the Lord, so that in effect they are but one house. When she saw all this, "there was no more spirit (*i. e.*, breath) in her." It was so wonderful that she fairly sank down under the weight of the glory of the vision. As we should say, it fairly "took her breath away." Is not this like that which happens to every soul when he gets for the first time a real sight of the glory and grace of our Saviour Lord? "Eye hath not seen; ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But they are revealed unto us by his Spirit." It is nothing to the point that unbelievers and caviling critics do not see these things. Was it not something like this when Paul declared that what things he had counted gain to him he now counted but loss, and did regard them but a heap of refuse, in comparison with the excellency of the glory of God which he saw in Christ?

3.—She confessed.—She was not content to take this revelation of Solomon's glory quietly and keep her thoughts to herself about it all. "It was a true report which I heard." Thus she declared her conviction and her acceptance. Not only was it a true report, but the half was not told her. "Thy wisdom and thy prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard." Can any one know the half of the glory of Christ by mere report? Must we not see ourselves and come into the presence of him who is the One altogether lovely, and the chief among ten thousand, to know the truth? No Christian can tell another what are the joys of salvation. It is not possible for one standing on the inside of a cathedral to tell to one standing on the outside how beautiful are the glorious stained and pictured windows, through which the light of God's sun shines. If any one would know their beauty, he must enter in himself. So must the soul come into fellowship with Christ before he can know even the half of that which is reported.

4.—She rejoiced with those who were his friends.—"Happy are thy men; happy these thy servants, which stand continually before thee and hear thy wisdom." This was, to her, more to be desired than apartments and meat and raiment. It is the blessedness of personal communion with Jesus that excites the highest gladness. To be forgiven and justified and clothed in righteousness, and to come to the many mansions at last is a great joy, but not so great as to be reconciled to God, and brought into fellowship with Christ. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him," and daily is the delight of those who stand in his presence.

5.—**She blessed God.**—That is, she praised the Lord because he had delighted in Solomon, and set him on the throne of Israel, because of the love he had for Israel. She saw this wonder of God's grace and praised God for so great love to the nation over whom Solomon reigned. So do we bless God for Jesus Christ, because we see in his exaltation a demonstration of his love for us. It was for our sakes that he came, that God raised him up, and hath seated him on his right hand. Let us not be outdone by the Queen of Sheba in praising God for such love and grace.

6.—**She gave and received gifts.**—As a proof of her conversion, she laid down at the feet of Israel's glorious king the gifts she had brought for that very purpose. This was a token of her submission to him in the matter of his glorious wisdom. Every one that comes to Jesus truly, comes with the gift of himself and all that he has. He is worthy of it all. She brought him such things as she had; they were the things he needed, and she gave them generously. So ought we to give, not what we have not, but what we have, for the Lord hath need both of us and of our gifts, and he delights in and loves the cheerful giver. But if she gave generous gifts to Solomon, Solomon gave yet more generously to her. "And King Solomon gave unto the Queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty." So does our Lord give to us, not only of his royal bounty, that which he came to give, life more abundantly, and a thousand things which we do not ask for, but beside, "whatsoever we ask in his name, that does he give to us." He is no loser who gives himself and all he has to God. Our gifts are but the handful of seed cast into the ground, while his to us is the harvest gathered an hundredfold.

7.—**She went on her way rejoicing.**—Even so did the eunuch, and even so do all those who truly come to Jesus, the greater than Solomon, and receive of him the wisdom that cometh from above and maketh wise unto salvation. Let all who have questions and need, all who have heard the report of the wisdom and grace of Jesus, come to him and "taste and see that the Lord is gracious," and then shall they go away reporting in their turn, "that the half has never been told," and carry with them the royal bounty of God in proof of what they say.

LESSON L.

SOLOMON'S FALL.—I. Kings xi, 4-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.—I. Cor. x, 12.

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded. Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding, in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.—I. Kings xi, 4-13.

The attentive reader of the Bible must have wondered, all along, at the temerity with which Solomon disregarded some of the most stringent laws of God during the earlier part of his reign, and whether or not these things could be without bringing about a downfall and incurring the anger of God. But the Bible is always consistent with itself. "The way of the transgressor is hard," and sin will surely find a man out. "As a man sows, so shall he reap;" and "he that being often reprov'd and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed." These are Solomon's own teachings. He proved the truth of them. Was there ever a more melancholy sight since the world began than is seen in the fall of Solomon? Good Bishop Hall has well said: "Since the first man Adam, the world hath not yielded so great an example of wisdom or so fearful an example of apostasy, as Solomon." The builder of the Temple becomes the builder of altars to the filthy and cruel gods of the

heathen. The wisest of kings yields himself to be the patron of the most foolish of superstitions. The teacher of the Church is led away by the follies of foolish women; the beloved of God falls under his anger. This glorious monarch, who shone in his glory as the sun at its strength, goes down in a cloud of disgrace. He is but twice mentioned in the New Testament, and that only to speak once of his outward glory and once as a background against which to show the wisdom of a heathen queen. Though he was the greatest king of antiquity, and that in the royal line of David, and more highly favored and honored of God than any other ruler who ever lived, yet does his name not appear among the heroes of faith. The whole story is full of solemn lessons, and those which we should not only study, but lay seriously to heart.

I.—SOLOMON'S SIN.

The sin and fall of Solomon has appeared incredible to many, and yet it is easily traced, and has an intelligent explanation in the whole course of his life. It is not uncommon to see unparalleled virtues in very close juxtaposition with the most unparalleled vices. A pious parentage, a religious education, a promising youth, extraordinary intellectual endowments, frequent warnings and tenderest entreaties, have been the portion of others besides Solomon, who have yet fallen headlong into sin, and been lost from the life and the glory of God.

1.—**What led to his sin.**—No man becomes bad suddenly. There is always a pathway down which man passes to destruction, as there is always one that leads upward to glory and honor. In our lesson we are only reminded of one, and that the culminating cause of his sin. "His wives turned away his heart after other gods." This is at once a statement of his sin and of the road to it. "Solomon loved many strange women." "He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart." This is the story. God's word contained three distinct prohibitions which the king should have observed, but every one of which he disregarded. The king was forbidden to increase his horses, he was forbidden to heap up gold and silver, and he was forbidden to multiply wives. All these prohibitions are set forth in the last words of Moses. (Deut. xvii, 16, 17.) In the latter part of the chapter preceding our lesson, we have an account of how the king multiplied his horses and his silver and his gold. In this chapter we see how he had disregarded the command of God in respect of multiplying wives. The prohibition against multiplying wives, and especially wives taken from the

heathen nations, is often repeated in the Scriptures, and the reason therefor is given: "For they will turn away thy sons from following me, that they may serve other gods; so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against thee, and destroy thee suddenly." (Ex. xxxiv, 13-16; Deut. vii, 3, 4.) Solomon undermined the foundation of his loyalty to God in the first marriage he contracted, and steadily picked away at it until the whole superstructure of his life fell a heap of ruins about his wives. The practical lesson for us to draw from all this is the danger, as well as the sin, of contracting unholy alliances with things or persons alienated from God, and which represent sin and worldliness. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (II. Cor. vi, 14), is the command which God has laid upon us in this our day. It has the same significance as his ancient prohibition of marriages with the heathen nations. And yet how many of God's people systematically disregard this command. How many believers deliberately marry with unbelievers. It is no justification of this law of God that the believer loves the unbeliever, for this was Solomon's case. "Solomon loved many strange women." If our love of things justified our use of them, especially in the face of God's command, we should soon all make shipwreck of life. God's gracious and loving word comes in to correct our blind desires and our unwise loves. The chances are ten to one that in the case of a believer marrying an unbeliever, the unbelieving husband or wife will turn away the heart of the believer from the Lord, against one chance to ten that the believer will win the unbeliever. Untold misery, both temporal and spiritual, has been and still is the result of such forbidden alliances. But this prohibition is equally against unholy business alliances. The Christian man who yokes himself up in business with an unbeliever, is apt to be corrupted by practices and principles which, though he does not approve, yet must he submit to because he is under the yoke with the unbeliever. It is the same in society. Whenever the Christian surrenders himself to the society of the unbelieving world, his heart will be led away from God. This is especially true of thousands of Christian men who have deliberately yoked themselves up with unbelievers in all manner of secret societies. This latter course of false alliance is doing more mischief to individual Christian men by turning their hearts away from God and his service, and to the Church by depleting and robbing her of her male membership, than any other one modern enemy of Christ. There never was a time when the cry, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord," was more needed than now.

2.—The nature of his sin.—At first sight it would seem that the

multiplying of wives was the sin against which the Lord's anger against Solomon burned; but a further look will reveal the fact that the sin which God so particularly hated was the sanctioning and patronage which Solomon gave to the worship of idols. "His wives turned away his heart after other gods." Because this sin is specified and is the greater of the two—i. e., greater than the gathering of a monstrous harem of wives and concubines—it is not to be understood that there was not grievous sin in this also. In considering this double sin of Solomon, we must keep two facts in mind: First, that the collection of these multitudinous wives and concubines was not probably due to any mere low lust on the part of the king. It was rather an appendage to his court. He sought out all the beautiful princesses of the surrounding nations and married them; and in addition to this, he sought out all the most beautiful women about him and added them to his harem. This was a part of his glory, according to the judgment of the world. An Eastern king was estimated largely by the size of his seraglio. Solomon would outdo all his neighbors in this respect, as in all others. No doubt there were unworthy indulgences in this connection, but they were not the main motive of this multiplication of wives. Second, as to the "going after strange gods." The idolatry of Solomon was constructive rather than actual. While he ordered the idol temples built, and countenanced their worship, he did not himself become a worshiper of idols. He built the shrines and altars rather to please his wives, perhaps the prime favorites among them, than because he himself ceased to pay his worship to the true God. Solomon was too wise a man to give himself up to the worship of the heathen vanities, but he was too disloyal to God to forbid the vanity and wickedness in his household. The expression, "For Solomon went after Ashtoreth, and Milcom, and the abominations of the Ammonites," does not mean that he personally served them, but that he patronized and countenanced them. This was bad enough. For he that bids another godspeed in a false doctrine is a partaker with him in it. This false liberality on the part of Solomon was proof that his heart had turned away from the Lord. When we consider the nature of the worship of the idols, we see still further how utterly apostate the heart of Solomon had become. The worship of Ashtoreth was accompanied by the most bestial of sins; in fact, it was the worship of the procreative powers of man, and the cult was adulterous in action. The worship of Molech or Milcom was a murderous one; for, having worshiped Ashtoreth by adultery, Milcom claimed the fruit of the adulterous worship as an offering to him; therefore the incestuous children of the worshipers of Ashtoreth were

passed through the fire of Molech. Could any thing be more hideous, and could any thing show how utterly Solomon's heart had turned from the Lord, than that he gave his countenance to these things, even though he took no part in them himself? Such a building of altars and shrines about Jerusalem and under the authority of the solemnly anointed King of Jehovah, was most dishonoring to him; and moreover, that Jerusalem was surrounded by these idol shrines, was a kind of defiance of the Lord. When David had taken Jerusalem from the Jebusites, he had hurled the idols down the "gutter" that led up to the walls of the fortress; but now Solomon his son builds a rampart of idol temples about the Holy City. They surround Jerusalem as an encampment of besieging enemies. It is not surprising that the Lord was angry at this defiance, and at Solomon, his king, for countenancing it, not to say corrupting and debauching his people thereby. And will not God be justly angry with us if we surround our lives, which are professedly given to him, by a hundred worldly and sinful practices? The shrines that are built to the idols of gain, pleasure, and earthly power are almost as numerous as were these shrines built by Solomon's wives. Thus "Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father." David was not a perfect man, but his heart was loyal to God, and he would not have tolerated any thing that affected the honor of Jehovah. David sinned once and grievously, but Solomon sinned deliberately and weakly, and against the central truth of Jehovah's being.

4.—The progress of his sin.—We have seen how Solomon gradually fell into his sin. He probably would have been as shocked as God was finally angry, had any one told him when he married Pharaoh's daughter, that that step would end at the foot of the downward road to idolatry and apostasy. Having taken wives to himself, he suffered his heart by them to be turned away from the Lord. It is not said that his head was turned away from the Lord. All apostasy is of the heart rather than the head. The heart—the affections and desires—govern men rather than their intelligence and judgment. We are therefore warned against an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. Solomon himself has exhorted us "to keep the heart, for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. iv, 23.) The progress of sin is seen first in the turning away of the heart, and then in the turning away of the life.

5.—The time and circumstances of his sin.—We are surprised always when we hear of an old man falling into sin; and yet Solomon sinned after he had reigned thirty years or more. He was nearly sixty years old at this time. His age ought to have saved him from such

folly. But there is no safety from sin in mere number of years. David was an old man when he fell. Solomon's sin, no doubt, was the result of cumulative progress of heart-forsaking of God. It was not a sudden temptation which carried him down, as in the case of David, his father, but it was the outcome of a long series of disregard for the law or God, and in the face of many warnings. It was when he was at the very height of his glory and fame, when he was the richest and most powerful. How true it is, that no earthly estate is a guarantee that man will stand, and no outward prosperity is a proof of inward integrity. Almost every week the community is shocked by the report of some man going bad who, like Solomon, has attained to years, and honor, and prosperity. Their hearts had been turned away, every one of them, from the Lord. Neither age nor youth, neither prosperity nor adversity are safeguards. God only can keep us from falling, and only then when our hearts are given to him and we follow him fully.

II.—SOLOMON'S PUNISHMENT.

Punishment is the inevitable consequence of sin. It is so not only in the nature of things, but it is so in the moral of things. If a man sows to the flesh, he shall of the flesh reap corruption. Sin brings about its own consequences. But this is not the whole of sin's punishment. God's righteous anger kindled against the sinner, is also a factor in sin's punishment. And this is just and right. If God had winked and connived at Solomon's sin, what mischief would have been wrought in Israel, and that without sense of guilt. If God does not punish sin, then there is no wrong in sin, and man may sin with impunity, except so far as external consequences are concerned. If sin is not wrong to the extent that it justly merits the judicial anger of God, then it can work no harm to the character of man, for that is essentially moral, and not material.

1.—**The anger of the Lord.**—This is the first and chiefest element in punishment. The sense of the holy anger of God is worse than any affliction that can come upon man. To know that the holy, and loving, and long-suffering, and patiently forbearing God has turned his anger against us, is to suffer the very worst consequences for our sin. Solomon had been the beloved of God; now he was to experience the anger of him who had heaped up his favors upon him until he was exalted to heaven. Let us remember that God hates sin wherever it is found, but he especially hates it in his people, especially in those whom he loves. We know this ourselves. We can tolerate wrong-doing in the children of other people where we will not allow it in our own.

Idolatry was an offense to God among the heathen, but it was an intolerable and abominable matter to him among his own people and in the very city where he had set his name. Again, let us remember that God's anger is in proportion to his former favor. It is more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for the cities of Judea. The Queen of Sheba shall rise up in judgment against those Jews who rejected Christ. The anger of God against Solomon burned the hotter because he had been so highly favored, and knew so much better than others the wrong as well as the shame of his sin.

2.—The specific reason for the Lord's anger.—God hated the idolatry, but the record points out the reason for the Lord's anger against Solomon. (a) *In that his heart was turned away from the Lord.* It is idle and foolish to say that such anger is unworthy of God, that in this he acted like a foolish and jealous human being. But God is a jealous God; not in the weakness of a mere human passion, but in the grandeur and infinite love of one who cares for his people as much as for himself, and knows that it is only as he can keep their love that they can reach the high destiny he has for them. David sinned, but his heart was never turned away from God; Solomon sinned because his heart was turned away. This was the difference between the father and the son. Solomon allowed a human love to displace the divine love, and gave to the strange women who hated and despised Jehovah, the place in his affections which God only should have occupied. (b) *The wantonness of his sin.* God had warned him against this sin, and set before him the consequences of it both to the nation and to the glorious Temple. (ix, 6, 7.) Moreover, God had twice appeared to Solomon and set all things before him, thus conferring upon him distinguished favor, and giving him exceptional advantages by way of instruction—once at the time of his inauguration as king and once at the time of the dedication of the Temple. (iii, 5; ix, 2.) The king had no excuse, and must have gone into his sin in mere defiance of God. Has not God so given us every warning and caution? What excuse have we for sin who are so fully and lovingly instructed? Consider, also, that Solomon had himself been a foremost teacher of others, and especially warned them against turning away from the Lord, and now himself becomes a castaway. (c) *The base ingratitude of his sin.* What more could the Lord have done for any human being than he had done for this man? The Lord had given him every thing that man could possess under the sun; and now his answer is to participate in an insult to his being, an offense to his holiness, and a defiance of his justice, not to say a grief to his love. So is all our sin ungrateful.

3.—**The form of his punishment.**—The punishment which came upon Solomon was both severe and yet a mitigated one. (a) *The severity of it.* The kingdom was to be rent from his hand and given to one of his servants. Under Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, the ten tribes rebelled against Judah's king, and became permanently separated from his kingdom. The mighty kingdom was reduced to a little petty principedom; and, moreover, this was done at the hands of one of his servants. This was a bitter draught to him, and he alludes to it in Eccl. ii, 19. (b) *But the severity of his punishment was mitigated by two qualifications.* First, the rebellion and rending of the kingdom should not be in his time; and second, there should be left to his son a small remnant of the kingdom, enough, in fact, to preserve the throne which he had given to his father, David. Thus did God temper his wrath with his mercy. "I will give thee one tribe." Alas! that so many of us are in danger of losing our great inheritance by sin, and yet how great the goodness of God, that spares even one tribe to us, that saves us even so as by fire, though our wood, hay, and stubble be burned up. This mercy was accorded to him because of David's sake and because of Jerusalem. Many of the mercies that come to us are intimately related with the grace of others, and for reasons above our mere interest. There arises a question in connection with this, viz.: How could this be any punishment to Solomon which did not take place in his life-time? Our only answer is that he knew in himself that he had fallen out of the favor of God and under his displeasure, which in itself was worse than losing the temporal kingdom. Again, we think there is here an intimation that in the world to come Solomon would know and suffer the consequences of his sin in this world. Even supposing him to have been saved, yet having builded with wood, hay, and stubble, instead of gold, silver, and precious stones, he "suffered loss." (II. Cor. iii, 11-15.) It is not only the lost soul that is a loser by sin; but even those who are saved may suffer loss, even though they themselves are not forever cast out from God's presence.

LESSON LI.

CLOSE OF SOLOMON'S REIGN.—I. Kings xi, 26—43.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*—Ecc. xii, 13.

And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: and Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: and he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (but he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: but I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever. Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.—I. Kings xi, 26—43.

The bulk of the text of our lesson to-day is devoted to Jeroboam, but the interest and center of it is still in Solomon, the sadly fallen

and deeply punished King of Israel. The end of this king is a most pitiful one, and does not in the least correspond with its beginning. Never had a man or a ruler so bright a morning; his noon was filled with the splendor of a glorious day; but his evening was overcast with dark and ominous clouds, and he died in the darkness of God's night of judgment. We can not but be reminded of his own sad and bitter words, "For I will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." So did God bring him into judgment, and has left us the record of it for our learning and profit. Lord Bacon is said to have remarked one day when pondering over his fall and disgrace: "The saddest sight in this world is to see a man walking in procession at the funeral of his own greatness." This is how we see Solomon in his last days.

I.—OF JEROBOAM, THE SON OF NEBAT.

We have here the first mention of this at once famous and infamous man, "who made Israel to sin." There is much in his history, especially in the brief account of it given in our lesson, upon which we may ponder with profit. His subsequent history does not fall under our study at present, but we can not help thinking of it in connection with this introduction to him, and with the last days of Solomon's reign. Some glimpse of his history and character, and the circumstances of his early life, is given us here.

1.—**He was the son of a widow.**—He is called the son of Nebat because that was his father's name; but the name of his mother is mentioned (a thing unusual in Jewish history) because she was in all probability at this time a widow. His mother's name was Zeruah. It is more than likely he was an obscure lad from a country town, who had come to Jerusalem, as many another widow's son has, to "seek his fortune." The lesson to be derived from this is the familiar one: that worldly prosperity does not depend upon early advantages so much as it does upon character and energy. No boy need despair of success in life because he is poor and obscure, and nothing more than a widow's son.

2.—**He was a man of great energy and industry.**—"A mighty man of valor" and "industrious." These were his principal characteristics. It seems that, with others of his tribe, he was engaged upon the works about the fortifications of Jerusalem. In this humble occupation he showed himself both full of ambition and industrious. He did that which he had to do with spirit, and was not afraid of work. These are the traits that push a man along. Some of the most dis-

tinguished men in our country began life in this way. First taking the place of common laborers, they showed themselves to be energetic and industrious, doing with their might what their hands found to do, and determined to improve their position and condition. It is the end of many a lad to get through his work as soon as possible, and do just as little as he can. Such boys will never rise. They will remain subordinates always, even if they do not fall lower and lower in the scale of position. It is not only on the field of battle that a man may prove himself to be "a mighty man of valor," but at a day laborer's work he may display this noble trait. It requires as much courage, perhaps more, to take up the common burdens of life and carry them with spirit and energy, as to face an enemy on the field of battle. Valor is strength; it is determination; it is courage; it is virtue. It is a virtue to be exercised everywhere. Such a young man was Jeroboam.

3.—He was a protégé of the king.—The energy and industry of Jeroboam was brought to the attention of the king, who, observing him from day to day, took a deep interest in him, and gave him his favor. It was not in the thought of the young man that he would attract the royal attention; he probably never dreamed that the king would know him any more than he did a hundred other youths; but this is true, that if a young man makes himself conspicuous by his energy and industry, some one who is able to help him forward will be sure to observe him and come to his aid. Energetic and industrious young men are always in demand, and are sure to be found out. They need not of themselves seek recognition. It will come to them unsought. A man's work is his best recommendation.

4.—He was promoted to high position.—The king having noticed and watched him carefully until he was satisfied of his stability as well as energy and industry, promoted him to be ruler or superintendent of the works which were committed to the tribe of Ephraim. Like Joseph, his father, he came to be "head over all." This lies in the pathway of all industrious and persevering young men. There is always "room at the top" in any calling or profession. The way to get there is to make one's self conspicuously useful in whatever position one finds himself. The lazy and indifferent ones will readily stand aside to make room for such. Nor need there be unfair rivalry among men like-minded, for there are more places at the top open and waiting for the valorous and industrious than there are young men fitted to fill them.

5.—He was an instrument in the hands of God.—Not only was Jeroboam a servant of the king, but God had chosen him to be a

servant for him in bringing about his purposes. Fitness is observed both in heaven and on earth. God has need of energetic men as well as kings. It is an inspiration to know that the eye of God is upon us in our work, to see if he can use us in his work. This is especially true of those who fear God, as we fear Jeroboam did not. But if God has need of men who have great natural and acquired gifts, even though they do not fear him, much more may those expect to be used of God who, in addition to valor and industry, have this to their name, that they fear the Lord and walk in his commandments.

6.—He was a rebel against God and his kingly patron.—Here we begin to see the worm that finally gnawed down this great tree. His ambition took fire, when he found out that God had a great destiny for him in connection with the rending of the kingdom from Solomon, and forgetting the favor which he had received at the hands of Solomon, and flatly disobeying the command of God that Solomon was not to be interfered with during his life, he rushed forward and lifted his hand against the king. (vs. 26, 35.) God had appointed him to be king over ten tribes, and promised him all his desire, and to establish him a sure house, as he did David, on condition that he would hearken to his commandments and walk in his ways, and do what was right in his sight. But his ambition and impatience to be a king, led him to take the matter in his own hand, and so he rebelled at the very outset, both against God's word and against the king. When we seek God's gifts rather than God's will, we are sure to go wrong and make a mess of our lives. The trouble with Jeroboam was that he was selfish and without the fear of God. His good qualities were nullified by the want of reverence for and obedience to God. This is not only a serious defect, but it is a fatal one. It will, in the end, profit no man any thing though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul.

7.—He lost a great opportunity.—What an opportunity Jeroboam had! And yet he threw it away through ambition, impatience, and disobedience. Eager to seize Solomon's kingdom, he lost his own; for though he was permitted to reign during his life, he lost it in the person of his son Nadab, who succeeded him, and with whom the dynasty ended. How many such opportunities are lost by men to whom God has spoken great words of promise, and before whom he has set open doors! "To fear God and keep his commandments," is the sure way to success in this life, and in the life to come. We notice here a great contrast between Jeroboam and David. During the life-time of Saul, God chose and anointed him to be king in the place of Saul; yet did not David do aught to snatch the kingdom from Saul's hand. He waited for God to give him the kingdom, according to his word, and

so secured it to himself and his house forever; for the dynasty of David never failed during all the long years of Judah's existence, and it will yet be revived when his great son comes to re-establish it. Let us remember that it is not all of our life to live the few brief years of our earthly existence, but that it is projected into the far distant eternity; and as we live and obey God here, so shall we live and be blessed and honored of God in all time and eternity.

II.—RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

Leaving now the history of Jeroboam, we turn again to consider the dealings of God with his faithless king, the unhappy Solomon. It is impossible to pursue the course of God's retributive justice in his case without the greatest feeling of sadness, and yet with a profounder feeling of awe. Again do the solemn words of the unhappy king sound in our ears. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." (Eccl. xii, 14, with II. Cor. v, 10.)

1.—**It is certain to come.**—The overthrow of Solomon was long in coming, and was delayed by God's unwillingness to proceed to extremities with him. He had been many times warned, and had many years given him in which to turn from his evil ways, but he turned not, and the rod of divine displeasure fell at last, according to all that he had said. In this connection we are as much impressed with God's long-suffering as by the certainty of his chastisement. He waited long in Solomon's case, as he did in Saul's, as he does in every case. He waited long in the days of Noah before he overthrew the wicked antediluvian world. He waited long on Judah and Israel before he sent them away into captivity; he waited long on Judas, and gave him space to repent; he waited long on the faithless nation before he left their house unto them desolate; he is still long-suffering with an unbelieving world, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (II. Pet. iii.) Yet will he not tarry forever. If we repent not, judgment will come. The law of the harvest will prevail. If we sow to the wind, we shall reap the whirlwind; if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption. This law applies to all alike. Not only to the poor debased and besotted sinner, but to the rich and refined transgressor; to the king as well as to the peasant; to the recreant believer as well as to the scoffing infidel. No former favor or high worldly estate will act as a foil to the final judgment of God upon sin and wrong-doing.

2.—**God's hand in all retributive justice.**—In this history, as

in other histories recorded in the word of God, we see how plainly God's hand is in all our affairs, to bless the faithful and obedient, and to overthrow the faithless and disobedient. It is no less sure now than in former times. The scene between Ahijah and Jeroboam shows us how God brings things to pass. The same prophet who notified Solomon of the coming judgment (vs. 11.), now seeks out the instrument which God had chosen for his overthrow, and gives him his instructions. Who of us can calmly bear the thought of having God for our enemy? Neither Hadad, nor Rezon, nor Jeroboam could lift a hand to harm Solomon, until God gave him leave, and when he did give him leave, all Solomon's power and might could not avail to prevent him from carrying out God's purpose. We are reminded of two Scriptures: "Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" (I. Pet. iii, 13); and: "Can thy heart endure, and can thy hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it and will do it." (Ez. xxii, 14.) The bitter thought in connection with the judgment is, that it is administered by him who has exhausted the resources of his love and power to save and bless us.

3.—Man's hand in our afflictions.—God, indeed, is the active agent in bringing about the afflictions that befall us in this life, and perhaps in the life to come, but he uses men and things as his instruments. Hadad and Rezon beset Solomon from without and Jeroboam threatened him from within his own borders. Hadad and Rezon were his enemies and Jeroboam was his protégé. The land of Egypt, whence he got his queen, was the ally of his enemies, and his favorite captain was his treacherous friend. Even Ahijah, his court prophet, was now against him, as Samuel, the steadfast friend of Saul, was at last against him when God's time had come for judgment. We need fear no enemies if God be for us; we may trust no friend if God be against us.

4.—Judgment brought about by our own doings.—After all, when retributive justice comes at last, we have only ourselves to thank. It was not Hadad, nor Rezon, nor Ahijah, nor Jeroboam, that brought about the judgment against Solomon, but his own doing. He had sown the whirlwind that now rose against him. We can easily trace it. He abused God's great gifts by degrading them to selfish ends. His wisdom and glory, both gifts of God, he prostituted to be ministers to his pride. His power he used to gratify his own selfish and lower passions. Like Jeshurun, he "waxed fat" on God's bounty, and then "kicked" against his authority. We may be sure that we have, with our own hands, planted the evil seed of every harvest of affliction and judgment that comes upon us. All afflictions are not judgments, but

when they are in the nature of judgments, they are always the fruit of our own doings.

5.—The impossibility of averting judgment.—That is, by attempting to fight against God's order. Whether Solomon first heard that the prophet had commissioned Jeroboam to be king over ten tribes and so was roused to seek his life, or whether Jeroboam, impatient of the life of Solomon and of God's time, "lifted his hand against the king," and so became traitor, which is most likely, Solomon sought to do with him as he did with other enemies at the beginning of his reign; but he failed to put Jeroboam out of the way. God was now on the side of Jeroboam, though not on the side of his wicked and impatient endeavor to hasten his own advancement, and enabled him to escape out of the hands of the king. Moreover, the king's determination to kill Jeroboam only deepened his purpose and fixed his enmity. Thus we see that, instead of averting the judgment, he only made it the more sure. We can not fight against God; we can not but say to ourselves: "O, that instead of seeking to kill Jeroboam he had fallen prostrate at the feet of Jehovah, confessed, and judged his own sin; then would he not have been judged." Perhaps he did this later, and we have some reason to believe he did so, though not in time to avert the temporal judgment against his house.

III.—RETROSPECT.

We can not but look back over the life of Solomon and gather some of the sad lessons out of the evils which befell him in consequence of his sin. His progress from the height of his earthly glory was steadily downward; his heart was turned away from God. Pride took its place there; then came self-indulgence and disregard of God's law; then open and shameful sin in the matter of his patronage of idolatry, and all capped with a false security and a sense of his own self-sufficiency. Now see what came of it: (1) A shortened life (for he was but sixty years old when he died). His life was cut off by God, and he was not permitted to live out his days. It is not unlikely that his excesses in living had brought about an early death, but this also was God's judgment. (2) An embittered life. It is impossible to read the Ecclesiastes without seeing how bitter his closing days were. Much, if not all, these sad reflections were suggested by the doom of God against him; the references are unmistakable. (iii; v, 18; vi, 12, and throughout the whole book.) Contrast his case with that of Paul's. Solomon had every thing that the world could give, and yet was miserable; Paul had nothing, and yet was contented. Solomon was rich,

but had nothing; Paul was poor, and yet was the possessor of all things. He who is rich toward God can not be poor in this world; while he who is poor in spiritual possessions can not be rich even though he have the whole world. (3) He was haunted with premonitions of his coming downfall and the final destruction of his house by the "man that should come after him." Perhaps he thought both of the weakness and folly of his only son, who was to be his successor, and of Jeroboam, a mighty man of valor, of whose appointment to take and rend his kingdom he could not have been ignorant. (4) His heart must have been torn with remorse at his own evil course and filled with bitterness when he thought on the bright and promising days of his youth, when God was so gracious to him and took such delight in him. (5) His last days were harassed by enemies and plots against his life and kingdom. (6) His posthumous sufferings must have been great. That is, the thought of the downfall of his glorious kingdom, and the fading away of his glory underneath the cloud that should evermore cover his reduced and diminished house.

Whether the last days of Solomon were repentant as well as remorseful, is an open question. I can not but believe that he was at last a penitent man; and though he suffered the terrors of God's judgments, in time, he was saved from the final judgment upon the ungodly in the world to come. Let us at least hope that such was the case.

LESSON LII.

What "a good land and large" we have been traversing the past three months! What stores of divine truth have been opened up to our understandings and for our spiritual wealth! How shall we use this last Sunday in the year?

I.—REVIEW.

This might be conducted on the basis of questions touching the most marked impressions made upon our minds and hearts by the year's study.

II.—A TEMPERANCE LESSON.—Prov. xxiii, 29-35.

We have the option of a Temperance Lesson suggested by the following Scripture:

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine, when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.—Prov. xxiii, 29-35.

III.—A MISSIONARY LESSON.—Psalm cx, 1-7.

It will be easy to make an admirable Missionary Lesson in connection with the Scripture assigned:

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.—Ps. cx, 1-7.

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